



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NEDL TRANSFER



HN 5DMF 9

A VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCES



A Story of Modern
American Life

KD 39439

State of. Anthony,

Sept. 2. 98. 101.

State of. Anthony,

Sept. 2. 98. 101.

"A VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCES"
IS THE FOURTH OF TWELVE AMERICAN NOVELS TO BE PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS DURING 1901, WRITTEN FOR THE MOST PART BY NEW AMERICAN WRITERS, AND DEALING WITH DIFFERENT PHASES OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LIFE.

ALREADY PUBLISHED

"EASTOVER COURT HOUSE." By HENRY BURNHAM BOONE and KENNETH BROWN.

"THE SENTIMENTALISTS." By ARTHUR STANWOOD PIER.

"MARTIN BROOK." By MORGAN BATES.

A VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCES

A Novel

By
Geraldine Anthony



New York and London
Harper & Brothers Publishers
1901

KD 39439



Copyright, 1901, by HARPER & BROTHERS.

All rights reserved.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. CONTAINS SENTIMENTS OF HOSPITALITY	1
II. WE WELCOME THE STRANGER WITHIN OUR GATES	13
III. MISS HARCOURT	22
IV. WE PREPARE TO BE PASTORAL	30
V. THE PROGRESS OF MR. COURTENAY	40
VI. IN WHICH TREVOR IS IMBUED WITH THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY.	46
VII. SHOWS CERTAIN OLD-FASHIONED NOTIONS RE- GARDING THE EFFECTS OF THE MOON TO BE NOT ALTOGETHER ERRONEOUS.	59
VIII. MR. FLOYD ASKS FOR FACTS.	70
IX. MISS HARCOURT PREACHES A SERMON	82
X. PROVES THAT LUNAR INFLUENCE IS NOT ESSEN- TIAL FOR THE PRODUCTION OF MOONSHINE	93
XI. MR. COURTENAY IS LED THROUGH A LABYRINTH	100
XII. A FOOL'S ERRAND	108
XIII. THE LESSER EVIL	117
XIV. SUSPENSE.	123
XV. MR. FLOYD ASSUMES THE PART OF HERALD	135
XVI. WE VISIT A FASHIONABLE WATERING-PLACE	144
XVII. IN WHICH MR. PERCY TOWNSHEND SUCCORS A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS	153
XVIII. DEPICTS A STRUGGLE BETWEEN RIVAL POTEN- TATES, AND THE OVERTHROW OF THE MIGHT- IEST BY FATE	163

Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIX. WHEN THE CAT'S AWAY	172
XX. AN AMERICAN NIGHT'S ENTERTAINMENT . . .	178
XXI. PLAIN LANGUAGE FROM MR. FLOYD	188
XXII. SHOWS THE DISASTROUS RESULTS OF FIRE- WORKS	195
XXIII. MISS TREVOR GAINS HER POINT	209
XXIV. THE RESTORATION	226
XXV. MR. FLOYD PLAYS THE PART OF MINISTERING ANGEL TO HIS UNCLE	234
XXVI. A PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE	243
XXVII. CHERCHEZ LA FEMME	260
XXVIII. THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT	266
XXIX. A BOTANICAL EVENING	276
XXX. LES ABSENTS ONT TOUJOURS TORT	284
XXXI. MR. PERCIVAL SPECULATES HEAVILY IN CASTLES IN SPAIN	293
XXXII. A QUIET HOUR	300
XXXIII. A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE	312
XXXIV. PROVES THE VALUE OF AN IMPORTANT DOCU- MENT	322
XXXV. A COLLAPSE IN SPANISH ARCHITECTURE . . .	330
XXXVI. DIPLOMACY	340
XXXVII. FORTUNE FAVORS THE BOLD	356

A Victim of Circumstances

A Victim of Circumstances

CHAPTER I

CONTAINS SENTIMENTS OF HOSPITALITY

SOME years ago, when Jerome Park was in its glory, when persons of quality congregated in front of the Brunswick to watch the start of the "Pioneer" coach on its tri-weekly trip to the new Country Club at Westchester, when Mrs. Winchester and her daughters still exhibited their august countenances under new bonnets on Easter Sunday, and débutantes made their bows to society at afternoon teas in low-necked dresses—about the year of grace 1887, in short, as the reminiscient New Yorker will have divined—John Gervaise Henry, fifth Viscount Courtenay, ordered his son Reginald to resign his commission in the Irish Lancers, to dispose of his effects, and to sail for America on the strength of the proceeds, and two letters of introduction. The thoughtful parent sent also a more personal and explanatory missive in advance of his son, so that while the Honorable Reginald was still on the high

A Victim of Circumstances

seas a welcome was bespoken for him by his cousin, Roy Trevor.

Trevor was by no means a methodical person. He overlooked his kinsman's letter for several days, and when he finally pulled it out of his pocket at Mr. Townshend's Sunday musicale, instead of the book of cigarette papers for which he was searching, he eyed it with bewilderment, and demanded, "What on earth is this?"

"We will forgive you if you open it. It looks rather interesting," Bobby Floyd observed. "Now, if it was mine, I should know without looking that it was a bill, and chuck it into the fire."

"It's worse than a bill," said Trevor. "It seems I am importing a cousin."

"That's hard lines," said Mr. Floyd. "Where from?"

"England. It's one of the Courtenays."

"No more than I have been expecting for the last five years," said Mr. Floyd, who esteemed himself a prophet. "I always told you that you would have trouble with that family. See what a dog's life that old villain led your aunt; and here he is, shipping his children to you by instalments, and expecting you to marry 'em off, by Jove! for that's what it amounts to."

"There's only one of him," said Trevor, "and, what is more, his steamer is due on Tuesday. I am counting on your help in establishing him as befits his rank; so trot out some of those heiresses who are always sighing in vain for you, and console one of them with a prospective coronet."

Contains Sentiments of Hospitality

"Coldstream Guards, I suppose," said Percy Townshend, who clung to certain views about the English.

"Oh, dear, no! The Courtenays can't afford to serve their country for pleasure," said Trevor. "I know nothing about the man personally—never laid eyes on him, in fact, for his regiment was stationed in some beastly hole in Africa when I was staying with his father—but I judge from this letter that he is simple and guileless, and I trust he won't give us much trouble."

"Well, I don't see why he comes at this time of year," Mr. Floyd remarked in an injured tone. "Nobody is entertaining, there's nothing to do but go to the races, and as for Coaching-Day, I'm engaged for the Parade, and I certainly can't ask him to the dinner."

"You have become a consummate flower of fashion," said Trevor. "And as such I hoped to secure your kind patronage for Courtenay, especially as I'm not an afternoon-tea man myself; but if you won't do the honors for him, I can turn him over to Wingfield."

"I suppose you think I do this society act for pleasure," Mr. Floyd protested, "but I can assure you, it's not all beer and skittles to dance to Uncle Maturin's piping. For one thing I'm thankful that Sidney has come back. I sha'n't be called upon to entertain any more lions while he is here."

"Then I won't be so inconsiderate as to expect you to play social sponsor for my cousin," said Trevor. "I'll put him up at the club, and Wing-

A Victim of Circumstances

field can trot him around a bit. I am well aware that since the visit of the Duke of Colport the nobility of Great Britain finds small favor in your eyes."

"And can you wonder?" Mr. Floyd demanded hotly. "I put it to you impartially whether I hadn't cause to be indignant. I went to no end of trouble and expense, to say nothing of what I suffered from the old gentleman's freaks, painted menus, the Hungarian band behind a screen of palms, and planning weeks in advance to get the Winchesters to meet him, and take him on with them to the opera later, and you know how they act about their sacred box. What did the beggar do but keep us waiting three-quarters of an hour, and then turn up in a brown corduroy shooting-coat, by Jove! You may imagine Mrs. Winchester with a bad dinner, and the prospect of exhibiting such a dancing bear in her box; and the worst of it was, he hadn't presented his other introductions, and nobody knew whether he was a Duke or a bounder. She'll never forgive me for letting her in for it, and Uncle Maturin said I had no tact, and that Sidney would never have made such a blunder. Was it *my* fault that the man had no manners? You needn't laugh, for it's no laughing matter, and I don't propose to put myself in such a position again even for a friend of twenty years' standing."

"It is sometimes a disadvantage to have friends of twenty years' standing," said Trevor. "They treat you with such a devastating frankness. They inform you in advance that they consider you a

Contains Sentiments of Hospitality

nuisance—you, and your cattle, and the stranger that is within your gates.”

“I see Uncle Maturin looking in this direction,” said Percy, warningly. “They are beginning to sing.”

“Well, I came into this room on purpose to avoid the singing,” Mr. Floyd averred defiantly. “I’ve trotted about at his beck and call for two years, and I’m sick of it. Now, Sidney has come back, let him do the dutiful nephew, for I’ve struck.”

Through the open door of the smoking-room the prelude of a song rippled over a counter-current of chatter, and the clatter of cups by the samovar, the rustling of spring finery, the exclamations over Mr. Townshend’s new Madrazo gradually subsided into the hush which greets the first notes of the popular barytone. Mr. Townshend was a very cultivated old gentleman, if at times a singularly trying one, and his music, his pictures, his cook and his company were always to be accepted with confidence. He was one of those social veterans whose devotion to womankind has kept them from matrimonial ventures, so that those cares which might have been paternal were lavished upon his three nephews, to their lasting ingratitude. It was understood that he proposed to keep the bulk of his property intact, and as he held decided views on the requisites for the dispenser of wealth, he endeavored sedulously to provide himself with a successor who socially and practically was capable of wearing the mantle when it should ultimately descend. His health was precarious; an incurable

A Victim of Circumstances

though capricious disease lent uncertainty to his moods, and now, glancing into the smoking-room, dismay smote him at the thought that his niche in the world might one day be usurped by so graceless a host as either Bobby or Percy. Under cover of the music he slipped noiselessly out of the drawing-room, and joined his recalcitrant nephews. His fine head, still thickly covered with gray hair, appeared above the smoke wreaths in the door, bland, benevolent, but with a suggestive elevation of the chin which foreshadowed future eloquence. Mr. Townshend had a positive gift for language. He could deliver himself of the fiercest invective, the most withering sarcasm, in an even and polished demi-voice. His vocabulary was choice and extensive, and less agreeable when its powers were directed against one than when they lent a charm to some impersonal topic. "If you have quite finished your cigars," he now observed, "I should appreciate your help in entertaining my guests. Perhaps I forgot to mention that I *am* entertaining this afternoon."

"I feel that I have been remiss," said Percy, "but Sidney seemed to be doing the honors, and I thought I was hardly needed. The fact is, I must be going."

"The revel is yet young," said Trevor, "and you haven't told me what night you will dine with me to meet Courtenay. Would Thursday suit you both?"

"Admirably," said Percy, feeling the avuncular eye fixed critically upon him, and remembering

Contains Sentiments of Hospitality

Mr. Townshend's repeated assurances that he had no grace of manner. "I should be happy to have you and Mr. Courtenay dine with me also, if you will set some time apart for me."

"Bring him to me, my dear boy," said Mr. Townshend. "There are still some agreeable people left in town, and if you are willing to take pot-luck with a lonely old man, there is always a place at my table for you and your friends. Shall we say Saturday night?"

Trevor greeted this arrangement with satisfaction. Though constitutionally averse to responsibility himself, he had a genius for gracefully shifting it onto the shoulders of the right person.

"When this song is finished," said Mr. Townshend, turning again to the luckless Percy, "I beg that you will show my miniatures to Mrs. Verney, and circulate about the rooms as though the amusement of your friends were of some moment to you. As for Bobby, he may find the dining-room a more congenial field for his labors. Anything rather than this stagnation, this provincial inaction."

"Good Lord, what a tread-mill!" cried Mr. Floyd, as his uncle noiselessly made his way back to the drawing-room. "Come on, Percy. I'll do it this once, but I'll be hanged if I submit to this sort of thing much longer!"

Trevor was not addicted to general society, and in spite of his undeniable good looks, was observed to take a certain mysterious pride in the fact that he was not a ladies' man; so he sought the dining-room with Mr. Floyd, and found it occupied. Mr.

A Victim of Circumstances

Townshend's third nephew, Sidney Percival, was explaining the beauties of a set of Viennese enamels to a portly dilettante in gray grenadine, and cast a sidelong glance of martyrdom at them as they passed.

"I don't know whether you noticed it," said Mr. Floyd, confidentially, "but his manner on the wharf the other day wasn't what you would call enthusiastic."

"Did you expect him to fall on your neck, and cry, 'My preserver'?" Trevor inquired.

"Of course not; but, hang it, a man likes to be appreciated!" Mr. Floyd replied. "I do despise an unforgiving disposition."

"When you give a man good advice you can't expect him to overlook it in a hurry," said Trevor. "Do allow him a chance to display his deep and lasting ingratitude. He has probably forgotten all about it anyhow."

"Ah! that's where you don't know old Sid," Mr. Floyd averred. "He's one of those deceitful beggars that will stand so much you get into the way of thinking they'll stand everything, and then suddenly, without a word of warning, they'll burst into the most awful, tearing rage, and fairly make your blood run cold with the sarcastic things they'll say. All I did was to say that now he had plenty of money he needn't have anything more to do with those out-at-elbows newspaper fellows down at the *Punchinello* office. I don't see anything to take offence at in that, do you?"

"Tastes differ," said his friend. "The unvar-

Contains Sentiments of Hospitality

nished truth does not appeal to all alike. How soon can I get out of this? There's nobody here I want to talk to but Sidney, and I can't get him unless you will call the old woman off."

Percy Townshend was circulating around the rooms, according to direction, but he failed to convey the impression of enjoyment which his uncle had desired. Poor Percy had no bitterer trial than these famous Sunday afternoons, of which he disapproved on principle, and which loomed up through the week as the penalty of his politic relations with the Mammon of Unrighteousness. He took no interest in professional musicians; he hated china and enamels; he could see no difference between a Claude Monnet and an Old Master; and, above all, he detested that case of miniatures where in various fanciful costumes the beauties who had bloomed and faded during Mr. Townshend's long career smiled or languished at their successors out of their jewelled frames, preaching their sad little sermon from the text, "It is the most tragic thing in the world to have been supremely lovely, and to become old, ugly, forgotten." The comments of the women annoyed him. "These back-numbers teach me a lesson," said Mrs. Verney. "Any kind of dress is sure to look like Mrs. Noah's arking costume in a year or two, but one's own shoulders and a wisp of tulle never go out of fashion." "Dreadful, forward creature!" thought the luckless Percy. It was only Sidney who could take a real interest in the acquisition of a new picture, who could listen without inward rebellion to one of those triumphant histories

A Victim of Circumstances

of rival collectors circumvented, of long quests rewarded, of historic tea-sets completed piece by piece—all those little hopes and despairs so vital to the dilettante, so trivial to the practical mind of the sober business man. On seeing uncle and nephew intent over the congenial pursuit of cataloguing or rearranging all this museum of rare and useless treasures, a feeling of scorn and intolerance possessed the sensible Percy. All this Doulton, this Salviati, the faience portraits, the Wedgwood and majolica, offended his puritanical taste like so many idols. He surveyed them with the comforting thought, "Just wait until I get my hands on them!"

Every family has its prig and its scapegrace. There was no doubt in Mr. Townshend's mind as to the identity of the former, but he was still uncertain whether Bobby or Percival best merited the latter title. Mr. Floyd had no dignity, no discretion. As to Sidney, whose manner had a distinction for which his uncle took much credit, and who knew a picture when he saw it—Mr. Townshend crossed the room just in time to catch the scrap of the conversation between this newly returned wanderer and Mrs. Collier, who presided at the samovar.

"So you have really come home!" said the lady. "You scorned our unintellectual society so in the past that I can't help wondering what brought you."

"I came to get acquainted with my mother," said Percival. "I'm told she is a very charming woman."

Contains Sentiments of Hospitality

"You are not without honor in your own country," she went on. "Mr. Townshend seems disposed to kill the fatted calf for you."

"And they opened the fatted beer-bottle in the *Punchinello* office as a further oblation," said Percival. "They said I could come back if I wanted to, but that if I was going to charge any fancy, just - returned - from - Barbizon prices, they couldn't afford me."

"Don't go back to them yet. Come to tea with me to-morrow, and we'll think of something more worth your while," said Mrs. Collier. She rose as she spoke, and made her adieux to her host. The rooms were emptying fast. Percival lingered, pottering over the china cabinets, and Trevor and Bobby waited for him on the pavement outside. His uncle laid an affectionate hand on his shoulder. He was conscious of a great yearning and tenderness towards this big man who loved his china and recognized his pictures. Besides his pride in the one nephew whose looks and bearing satisfied him, he felt a great anxiety, which he hardly dared voice. "My dear boy," he said, "I am very glad to see you here again—more glad than you will ever realize, until you are a lonely old man yourself some day, and the people you love best are dead or scattered. I wish you were coming back to me here; but, of course, your mother has the best claim on you. Still, I am sure you won't altogether desert me. It is tiresome, I know, to talk to an old foggy; but it is a long time since you have been bored in that way, and at my age every year counts.

A Victim of Circumstances

Don't go away until you can leave me safely under the sod. You won't have long to wait."

It was three years since Percival had heard this eloquence, and the memory of his uncle's exactions and caprices was a little dimmed by absence. He knew of old this trick of cajoling like a woman, of playing upon the sympathies of an impatient audience by touching references to an increasing feebleness; yet he was a little moved by the tone of the consummate old actor, with whom, after all, he had spent the most agreeable hours of his checkered domestic life. "I can promise to stay until you are tired of me," he said.

"My dear boy," said Mr. Townshend, "I hardly dare to ask you the question, and yet it is the one thing needful to complete my happiness in having you at home again." He paused. He was actually embarrassed. He looked appealingly at his nephew, who flushed slightly, but met his anxious eye with perfect steadiness. "I wish I might know that you have come home alone."

"I came quite alone," said Percival, shaking hands with his uncle, who radiated satisfaction. The street door stood open to the mild spring twilight, and little gusts of fragrance were blown in from the potted azaleas in the vestibule. Mr. Townshend watched his nephew's departure with genuine emotion, and as the athletic figure swung out of sight he murmured, under his breath, "But what on earth *has* he done with her?"

CHAPTER II

WE WELCOME THE STRANGER WITHIN OUR GATES

HAVING been duly notified of Courtenay's arrival, Mr. Floyd went to call upon him at the Brunswick, where he had installed himself. The decorous Percy, on a hint from his uncle, accompanied him. On ordinary occasions he never left his office before half past five, but he quite agreed with Mr. Townshend that the volatile Bobby should not be left to his own discretion in judging how far the hospitality of his family was to be proffered to a new-comer.

"You'll see me talk to him," Mr. Floyd remarked to his cousin while they waited. "I don't propose to be bombarded with ridiculous questions about statistics and things. I shall forestall all that by informing him that we hunt grizzlies in Central Park, and I can tell him that your grandmother was a squaw, your father a cowboy. I'll offer to show him how to use a lariat, and I shall incidentally inform him that it's customary to dress for dinner when you're asked out."

"I beg you not to make an exhibition of me," Percy entreated.

"These English have no sense of

A Victim of Circumstances

humor," Mr. Floyd declared. "He'll never suspect that I'm chaffing him."

"He is certainly coming," said Percy, warningly. It was his lot in life to be perpetually admonishing somebody, but no one ever heeded him except his clerks and his mother.

Mr. Floyd cast a wicked eye down the corridor, and, seeing a young man approaching, burst into an exciting narrative. "Yes, as I was telling you, the beast almost had me. I was coming around the corner of Thirty-fourth Street with Wall-Eyed Bill, when I heard a terrific yell, and the next moment a thundering big catamount came tearing up Madison Avenue. I happened to have left both my derringers on the mantel-piece, but I drew my bowie-knife, and just as he got ready to spring I—"

"Don't mortify me to death!" Percy protested in vain, and the young Englishman entered the room in time to catch the end of Mr. Floyd's thrilling recital. He was a young man of medium height, with a fair skin, somewhat browned by exposure, very blue eyes, and closely cropped light hair, not handsome, but with an open, boyish expression which quite prepossessed Percy in his favor. Mr. Floyd was distinctly aggrieved to note that there was nothing extreme in his dress, and that his manner was shy but agreeable.

"It's awfully good of you to look me up," he said. "Trevor said you were coming. He was here this morning."

"How did you get on with him?" Mr. Floyd inquired.

We Welcome the Stranger

"I must tell you, Mr. Courtenay, that my cousin is very fond of joking," Percy hastily interpolated.

"But when it comes to that, let me tell you that this fellow here is the most amusing beggar in town," cried Mr. Floyd. "We're an amusing family, but Percy here takes the cake. Why, people come miles to hear his lectures."

The hapless Townshend, the model of stiff elegance and decorum, sat helpless under this outrageous fire of mendacity. Of what avail were denials and explanations, when the incorrigible Bobby was ready to cap each absurdity with a greater one, and to transform his very dignity into the mirth-provoking melancholy of a court jester? He floundered about in crucial embarrassment, made conventional inquiries, and finally succeeded in steering the conversation into safer channels, when Mr. Floyd, hearing a coach horn in the street, insisted on going to the door to see the "Pioneer" come in, and, standing by the steps, pointed out various celebrities to the new-comer, with such wealth of inaccurate detail that Percy's despair was complete. The air was warm and fresh. The pansies in the great bronze vases rustled and turned their dull sides to the breeze. Mr. Floyd's *bête noir*, Wingfield, detached himself from the little group of well-dressed loungers around the entrance and joined the trio. As the long stream of carriages filed by on their return from the Park, a livery-stable landau came to a momentary halt in front of the Brunswick, and two young girls, who sat with their backs to the horses, nodded to Mr. Floyd.

A Victim of Circumstances

In the place of honor, alone, very erect and scorning the cushions, was a small fat old woman in a camel's-hair shawl and a shocking bonnet. "Who is that old freak with Miss Harcourt?" Wingfield demanded, as he raised his hat.

"*Freak!*" Mr. Floyd repeated in an awful tone. "That's Madam Trevor."

"Only a cook or a duchess would dare to wear a bonnet like that," said Wingfield.

"They call her the Duchess of Fortmounthouse, you know," Percy explained to Courtenay. "She is a personage in her own part of the country."

"That other girl—the little one—is the prettiest thing I ever saw," said Wingfield. "Who is she, Bobby?"

"The general's daughter. She's not out yet. Sorry I can't introduce you to her, but it's not permitted," said Mr. Floyd. "The old lady is the most terrible chaperon, and I believe Roy and I are the only men permitted to enter the fold."

"She must consider you harmless," said Wingfield. "Tell her that I'm harmless, too. I'd give anything to paint that girl's portrait. Don't you suppose her grandmother would let her sit for me if I managed it properly?"

"If she's allowed to sit for anybody," Mr. Floyd opined, "you may be sure it will be for Sidney Percival. Poor beggars like you and me stand no chance at all. With Spriggy Harcourt it's a different matter. She is perfectly independent, and can know whom she pleases; but the general's children have only their name and their looks to

We Welcome the Stranger

bank on, and you'll see that the old lady won't stand any nonsense."

"I could never understand what General Trevor did with his money," said Percy. "Army men are generally more provident."

"Horses," said Mr. Floyd. "Dogs. Silver mines. Anyhow, they say he has nothing but his pay, and he can't live on that with his habits, you know. He's a generous creature, too. I've never seen more superb dinners than he gives, and since Uncle Stanley died he has sent Aunt Louise Percival the most gorgeous flowers every morning."

Meantime the landau had stopped in front of Mrs. Collier's, and Mr. Townshend, from the club window opposite, saw Madam Trevor alight and enter the house, convoying her granddaughters. This was the old gentleman's regular hour at the club, and he always finished the day with a short walk, with one of his nephews in attendance. This afternoon it was Percival, already restive under the yoke of policy, sitting in a corner with Trevor until the summons for departure should reach him. "Oh, yes, I saw her go in," said Madam Trevor's dutiful grandson. "I don't think I shall time my departure by her reappearance, though. I'm going up to Fortmounthouse for a month in June, and I've been to call on her once. She wouldn't let me take the girls to the theatre, and on the whole I prefer her in the country. Are you going up this summer?"

"I hardly expect to," said Percival. "I was thinking of getting in some polo this year."

A Victim of Circumstances

"Is it possible that you are not yearning to return to the cradle of your happy infancy?" Trevor protested. "I am shocked at your deplorable lack of sentiment. Now, I'm fond of the old place myself. The old lady trots out her '15 Madeira for my benefit, and Spriggy is always willing to be pastoral with me. We have all sorts of sylvan pleasures, such as mowing the tennis-court and whitewashing the chicken-coops, and discipline is relaxed when grandmother has all Fortmounthouse on her hands."

"I've grown too old to take gracefully to a crook and pipe," said his friend, "not to mention the fact that Mrs. Winchester held up her finger at me the last time I saw her, and said she feared I had low tastes."

"Ah, but both her girls are married now, and you've lost two relatives," said Trevor, "and grandmother doesn't take her opinions from any one. Spriggy was asking me about you only the other day, and wanted me to bring you to call. She is in her second season, if you please. It makes me feel old myself to see these children turning into full-fledged young ladies. Even little Clip is seventeen, and a beauty."

"Still the old nicknames?" Percival asked, laughing. "I wonder Madam Trevor permits it. Spriggy was a nice child. What sort of a girl is she now?"

"A very good sort," said Trevor. "No end of enthusiasm and energy, and as nice a disposition as I ever saw. I never knew that girl to be out of spirits. I'm awfully fond of Spriggy."

We Welcome the Stranger

"I'm afraid of boring her. The truth is, I know very little about girls," Percival announced, with an air of closing the question. Mr. Townshend was pushing his chair back from the window, and nodded at him benignly, and he rose to go. They had unwittingly timed their departure with Madam Trevor's reappearance, and the old gentleman crossed the street to assist the old lady into her carriage, though a deferential group of relatives escorted her to the step. The two girls stood behind their grandmother, silent and with discreetly lowered eyes. The taller of the pair was elaborately attired in most bewitching frills and furbelows; the younger was as demure as a little nun, in the plainest of school-girl uniform.

"Certainly, I remember Sidney perfectly," said the old lady, scrutinizing him with those all-seeing gray eyes which her old friend remembered as bright and kind as Miss Harcourt's. "He used to spend a week at a time with Roy when they were both in Highland frocks, and there was more mischief afoot on those days than any others in the calendar."

"I've grown in grace since then," said Percival, meekly. "It was undoubtedly the baleful influence of the Highland costume."

"I suppose we shall see you at Fortmounthouse this summer?" Madam Trevor went on. "Your mother will be glad to have you with her again."

"May I take the children out sailing?" Percival asked.

"You can see for yourself that Rose and Mar-

A Victim of Circumstances

jorie are no longer children, though I fear they are still tomboys," she replied. "No doubt James will be happy to go with you. I have heard him lament your absence more than once of late."

"My dear Mrs. Trevor," said Mr. Townshend, solicitously, "these hired conveyances are full of infection. You risk three precious lives every time you enter them. Permit me to offer you my carriage, which I beg you will use as your own as long as you remain in town. No, I insist. If you won't accept a trifling civility in the name of our old friendship, reflect that there is another memory which makes it a privilege to serve you and yours, and confer this favor upon me." His voice was full of emotion. Never had his eloquence appeared more touching. Even the shrewd old magnate, with all the experience of her seventy odd years, was not proof against this entreaty, and, as she placed her foot upon the carriage step, accorded her permission to send the victoria for her at ten the following morning.

"Then, on the whole, you will have none of me?" said Percival, taking her little black sunshade from Miss Harcourt, who was raising her gray skirts a decorous inch above her smart patent leathers as she prepared to follow her grandmother. "We are not quite such new friends that you need ask," she said, as she passed him. Little Miss Trevor raised her eyes to him for a moment, then dropped them swiftly, and bent her head until the broad brim of her hat hid them entirely. Their soft, appealing glance was not to be carelessly bestowed. Had not

We Welcome the Stranger

her grandmother just rebuked her for looking at the men in front of the Brunswick?

"You are to come, of course, if you can endure the quiet of the country, after all your wanderings," said Madam Trevor. "My young people complain of the dulness, so it may be well to import a little city gayety."

Mr. Townshend walked home leaning on his nephew's arm, discoursing expansively of the old lady's former beauty and his own heyday. "You are not young nowadays," he said. "It seems to me that the sun shone brighter then, that the spring was longer and fairer, and that youth was younger and life better worth living fifty years ago."

"This spring is not so bad," said Percival.

On the door-step Mr. Townshend paused and groaned.

"Stomach?" his nephew inquired.

"No—brain," said the uncle. "I have a most important sale at Sypher's put down in my note-book for to-morrow at ten—the beaker he mentions in his letter is undoubtedly the mate to the one you found at Blois—and now that old woman has got my victoria, I suppose I may sit at home and reflect that the opportunity of a lifetime is being neglected. No, I will *not* take a cab. I shall trouble you for so short a time that it's hardly necessary for you to thrust me into the very jaws of infection."

"Good Lord!" said Percival.

CHAPTER III

MISS HARCOURT

TREVOR'S dinner, which he gave in his own bachelor apartments, proved a great success, and launched Courtenay into the good graces of that influential matron Mrs. Collier, who acted as chaperon, and devoted herself to the menu with such enthusiasm that she quite overlooked the arbitrary manner in which the company had been seated. It was all very well to give the matron of the party to the guest of honor, but scandalous to place Mr. Floyd at her left hand, and to allot Miss Campbell to him for the evening, when every one knew that he preferred Miss Fielding, who fell to the share of Percy Townshend. Equally reprehensible was it in the host to take Margaret Bergen in to dinner, and then endeavor to monopolize his cousin Rose, whom he could see at any time, and who rightfully belonged to Percival. Notwithstanding all these risks, the conversation was unflagging, and Trevor had fresh cause to congratulate himself that he always did as he pleased.

Removed from the restraint of the all-pervading eye of Madam Trevor, Miss Harcourt displayed

Miss Harcourt

conversational powers of a lively order, and chattered away to the diversion of her neighbors. "I really didn't think it best to talk much to you the other day," she said to Percival, "for grandmamma had just been giving us both an awful lecture on the sin of staring at loungers, and—"

"You needn't apologize," said Percival. "I saw that you had recognized my besetting weakness. But until you can suggest some worthy employment for my time, I fear I must continue to emulate the grasshopper. I can only promise you that I won't sing all the summer."

"That's a concession," said Trevor. "But as Spriggy has never heard you sing, she can't appreciate it."

"Roy is the only one of us whom grandmamma finds perfect. You had better apply to him for some way of improving the shining hour," Miss Harcourt remarked, with an air of innocence. "Tell us what great and good thing you have been doing lately, won't you, Roy?"

"I have been trying to fall in love," said Trevor, solemnly.

"How flattering to all the women of your acquaintance!" cried his cousin, with a little shriek of laughter. "I see you made a failure of it."

"Since you spurned my suit, it is true that I am no longer susceptible," Trevor explained. "It is hard on me, too, for, seriously, I want to get married. I had a touch of fever a little while ago, and it occurred to me then how much better off I should be if I had some nice little woman to sit beside me and

A Victim of Circumstances

hold my hand. Then there is that house of Robinson's that he is so anxious to sell me—just the house I should like under the circumstances."

"Yes, it would certainly suit Robinson admirably to have you plunge blindly into matrimony for the purpose of taking that house off his hands," said Percival, reflectively. "He has already offered the same inducement to me. I began to fear that perhaps my mission in life was to accommodate him, but if you are disposed to fling yourself into the breach, I may still bear the yoke of solitude."

"You seem timid about it," said Trevor. "Now I shouldn't hesitate a minute, if once I found the right person. The reason there are so many unhappy marriages is that men marry girls who are old enough to be set in their ways, and have all sorts of hobbies. Now I shall take a young one and train her to suit my taste."

"Ah, now I see why you no longer love me," said Spriggy. "It was the tapestry-painting."

"No, it was the cooking-school," said Trevor, gravely. "I felt that life was still too dear to me for such a burnt-offering, and I called in my affections."

Courtenay became so much absorbed in this conversation that he could hardly pay a proper attention to Mrs. Collier's remarks. Miss Harcourt amazed and fascinated him. She was so young, so gentle and sympathetic, under the shaded lights of the drawing-room, and now she showed herself past mistress of a style of badinage which bewildered him. He himself was not gifted with a ready tongue. He seemed a rather guileless young man, with a ten-

Miss Harcourt

dency to trust too implicitly in extravagant schemes, and to hope too confidently that through no special exertion of his own the purse of Fortunatus would drop into his hands. There was something touching about this simple trust in the fickle goddess, and women instinctively assumed a sympathetic and protecting attitude towards him. Spriggy, being very much alive to those impulses which habitually visit her sex, had in the space of ten minutes conveyed to him the impression that here was an ear ever ready to listen and a heart abounding in sympathy. He wanted to talk to her about himself, though he was naturally the least egotistical of men. He had been homesick, lonely, lost in the intimate circle which surrounded him, and here was a kind little hand held out to him with a promise of future intimacy, and a cordial interest in those things of which he was too diffident to speak to older and more sophisticated people. Her latest attitude dazzled him. Her appearance under the full light was more brilliant than he had anticipated. Her yellow hair, her pink-and-white freshness, and the air of extreme fashion which stamped the least detail of her dress, impressed him with the importance of this young heiress, and he was overcome with gratitude at her kindness. Mr. Floyd had posted him as to the solid side of her attractions, and had further vouchsafed the information that she was not for the first-comer. After his dreary years of African campaigning, and the desertion of the country seat where he had recovered from a fever, his head was in a condition to be easily turned, even by a less

A Victim of Circumstances

skilful hand than hers. It must also be admitted that under the care of her aunt and accredited duenna, Mrs. Collier, the young girl had acquired some practice in those arts which the strictest chaperonage cannot wholly suppress. She was not herself aware of the extent of her powers, being as yet unspoiled and free from self-consciousness, but her instinct did her good social service, and even Percy Townshend, though he considered her flippant and frivolous, could not help listening to her.

The night was warm, and the windows were open overlooking the square beneath, where the electric lights made a fair substitute for a moon. As they left the dining-room, the cooler parlor, with its rose-shaded lamps and inviting couches, wooed them to the diversion which Mr. Floyd had aptly christened "trowseying," and Percival found himself again with Miss Harcourt. "Now tell me about your painting," she said, settling her white skirts on the divan. "Roy says you have had a picture accepted by the Salon. It must be delightful to feel that you have done something worth while in the world."

"It must be, indeed," said Percival, "but I'm not yet familiar with the sensation."

"Aren't you satisfied? I'm afraid you are too ambitious," she ventured, with a motherly air. "You shouldn't expect everything all at once."

"I'm afraid I'm not ambitious enough, on the contrary," he said. "I don't seem to be able to do work that satisfies me, and so I get disgusted, and want to break stones on the road. Nature never

Miss Harcourt

intended me for anything but a very ordinary portrait-painter, with a cheap trick of catching a likeness—and I had at one time a notion of rivalling Gérôme. I have dropped that, by the way.”

“But you will surely have a studio here?” she urged, a little disappointed at his tone, with its disquieting hint of doubt and discontent.

“I don’t believe I can work here—not even at women in ball-dresses,” he answered, laughing. “The atmosphere of New York is too distracting for a simple painter.”

“You mean for a hardened club-man,” Miss Harcourt declared. “I fear you have grown unpatriotic.”

“Not entirely, I assure you,” said Percival. “As we steamed into the harbor I was good New-Yorker enough to find it the most beautiful in the world, and to feel a certain thrill of unsuspected patriotism. It is true that the glow faded at Quarantine, and died at the custom-house, and by the time I reached Union Square I wondered why I had come home at all, and what on earth I had to come home to.”

“I am ashamed of you,” said Spriggy, gravely.

“Now, of course, I no longer ask myself,” he added, with a little bow.

“You can still make pretty speeches, but now you don’t mean them,” she said, regretfully.

“Did I ever have a chance to make pretty speeches to you?”

“I don’t suppose you remember it, but those things make a great impression on a little girl. I

A Victim of Circumstances

was only fifteen then. It was the last time you came to Fortmounthouse before you went away. You put my saddle on your horse and let me ride him, and afterwards you came to my summer-house and drew pictures for us. You were troubled about something, and when you went away you told me I had been a great comfort to you."

"Yes, I remember," said Percival. "It wasn't a speech, though. It was the truth. And I see you haven't changed. Any nice thing I could say to you would still be true."

Mr. Floyd's voice here broke in, soaring high in an argument with Mrs. Collier. "Forward? You call *me* forward? Have you forgotten the day when you begged me to kiss you?"

"You are scandalous, Bobby," she declared. "Does one kiss and tell?"

"The point I'm trying to prove is that I *didn't* kiss," said Mr. Floyd. "I resisted nobly. I was a singularly beautiful child, with red cheeks and long auburn curls, and I scorned your advances. I have gained sense since then."

"Since that is the case, I must convey my innocent flock to safer pastures," said Mrs. Collier, rising. "Come, girls, I need my beauty-sleep, if you don't."

As Courtenay came back to the dining-room for a light, he saw his host throw his arm around Percival's shoulder and give him a sort of bear-hug, very surprising to the spectator, who had not found him particularly demonstrative. "Dear old

Miss Harcourt

man," he said, "you don't know how I've missed you!"

Meantime Miss Harcourt, far from seeking healthful slumbers, sat up until a late hour, writing a full account of the evening's festivities to her cousin Marjorie, doomed to the monotony of the school-room. "You will like Mr. Courtenay; he is such a nice, honest boy, and told me all about his life in the Soudan—a dreadful place, and I hope they will never send him there again. I had quite a long talk with Sidney after dinner. I wonder if you will think him changed? You will hardly remember him as I do, for you were so much younger when we used to see him. He acts tired, and he only listens out of politeness. He has lovely eyes, but he doesn't know it. I wish my lashes were half as thick. His hair would curl, if he would let it. He has pretty manners—rather insincere, though, and you know that he doesn't care a rap about you, or anything else. He is bored and, I think, unhappy. I wonder what it was that happened before he went away?"

CHAPTER IV

WE PREPARE TO BE PASTORAL

COURTENAY had a distinct idea of the sights which he desired to see in New York and its vicinity, and conscientiously visited the Brooklyn Bridge, Grant's Tomb, and a host of other places which Trevor avowed that he himself had never taken the trouble to see, and to which he flatly declined to escort his guest. "I've been through your Tower of London," he said, "which, I'll bet, is more than *you* can say. It's only evening things up for you to make the pilgrimages over here." So the young Englishman spent his days in solitary excursions to convenient shrines, and his nights in the diversions provided by his host, with whom he was now staying. Trevor, though very well aware of what he wanted, and quite capable of getting it if necessary, was constitutionally averse to exerting himself when he could induce any one else to act for him, and he found Courtenay singularly devoid of resource, deficient even in such a simple matter as knowing what a man would like for breakfast. He was also very literal, and had a startling habit of asking to have a speech explained to him when its maker had no explanation to offer. This was

We Prepare to be Pastoral

trying to Trevor, who revelled in saying what he did not mean, but on the whole they got on well together, and rather enjoyed their dissimilarity than otherwise.

Miss Harcourt had left town, after sundry small festivities arranged by the obliging Mrs. Collier, in which both Courtenay and Percival invariably figured, and now the magnate of Fortmounthouse favored her grandson and his guest with an invitation to visit her in June. Mr. Floyd was planning a speedy return to the paternal mansion, and indeed every one but Percival seemed destined to appear in Fortmounthouse sooner or later. He alone displayed no eagerness to go, though Trevor continued to urge him, but he gave Courtenay sundry bits of information about the place and the people, finding that the young man's lively interest was daily augmented by the startling comments of Mr. Floyd. "Oh, she'll arrange all that for you," the latter would assert confidently. "When she's had enough of you, depend on her to tell you so. You need never worry about imposing on the Trevors, you know, for they'll never give you the chance. Charming—charming—but with no hesitation about putting you down when they're done with you. Spriggy is the only one with enough constancy to bank on. The rest are a set of heartless weather-cocks."

"Don't be inaccurate, Bobby," Percival entreated, "or we shall think the excellent old lady has been lecturing you again. Unless things are prodigiously changed up there," he added, turning to Courtenay,

A Victim of Circumstances

"you will find that church and state have but one legitimate head, and that is Madam Trevor. She is a magnificent old autocrat. All the neighborhood trembles before her, and adores her. She built the church, and ordered the rector from designs of her own. She forced the railroad to build the station where she elected to have it, and she made the Floyds drain their pond. If I were to place myself under her jurisdiction, she would have me building new walls before I had time to protest, and that is why I am so afraid to go there."

"She has even erected her own monument, I am told," said Percy Townshend, who, it must be confessed, occasionally leavened the heaviness of the hated "Sundays" with a little mild gossip.

"Dear, yes," said Mr. Floyd; "I've seen it, inscription and all. Only the date is lacking. You mustn't fail to visit it. It's one of the sights of the place. The late lamented has quite an inferior one in a corner of the lot, but hers has the place of honor."

"Do you go to-morrow, Bobby?" Percy inquired, a little wistfully, for he began to fear that his only outing would be a medicinal trip to Saratoga, in attendance upon his uncle, who did not scruple to own that he would prefer Sidney. If only Percival could be prevailed upon to go! But poor Percy was well aware that he wouldn't.

"Oh, yes, I'm going," said Mr. Floyd. "Not that there's anything particular to do, but I think I need a rest. Besides, the girls expect me."

"The girls" were indeed in a state of expectancy,

We Prepare to be Pastoral

which their grandmother perceived, and snubbed promptly, if unavailingly. If constant admonition could have cured a decided tendency to tomboyishness, Miss Harcourt and Miss Trevor should certainly have been the models of deportment they showed themselves upon occasion. In fact, the general's two motherless children had been the exponents of so many of Madam Trevor's pet theories that only a fine natural obstinacy had preserved their individuality. James, the younger, was preparing for West Point with Mr. Berry, the rector. Marjorie pursued the thorny path of learning under the inefficient guidance of a local governess, subject to directions from her grandmother, and displayed no enthusiasm for the opportunities thus afforded her. Her injudicious cousin Spriggy, and her looking-glass, had told her that she was pretty enough to render accomplishments a superfluity, and the incipient homage paid her by the neighboring youths in church and in the village confirmed the flattering assertion of her charms. It is to be feared that at this period of her career Miss Trevor was openly and artlessly vain, and set more store by her golden hair and pink-and-white complexion than by those graces of mind which her grandmother strove to inculcate. She had vaguely divined that Madam Trevor was holding her in reserve for some destiny as yet unguessed, and she was impatient and apprehensive by turns, but tolerably well contented with her lot on the whole, especially when Spriggy returned from the city delightfully ready to ride, drive, row, or dig in the flower-garden, with praiseworthy indifference

A Victim of Circumstances

to muscles or complexion. Miss Trevor, though quite as great a hoyden as her cousin had ever been, was delicate and fragile of appearance, and appealingly soft of manner, and had been held up as a model by the mothers of the neighborhood (who did not know her well) to their romping daughters; but however much she joined in their play, the little boys had never regarded her as one of themselves, and had treated her as something ornamental and breakable, to be handled with care, and not to be taken on the rough excursions which Spriggy had been allowed to share. Her friends among the little boys had even fought about her, but Bobby, Roy, and Percival had never quarrelled over Spriggy.

Madam Trevor's house faced the river, and the great lawn stretched down to the bluff which overhung the water. Beneath this bluff a narrow pebbly beach with a boat-house and landing tempted the energetic person to scramble down the steep path and embark for a voyage on the Hudson. The rear of the house gave toward the main road, and in order to reach the *porte-cochère* at the side it was necessary to make a long *détour* through the back gate, past the stables and conservatories, and around the oval planted with lilacs and horse-chestnuts. There was another road which led from the north entrance, in a dignified and seemly manner, to the main door; but Madam Trevor, unwilling to keep so much driveway in repair, had strictly prohibited its use, padlocked the north gate, and closed the porter's lodge. Behind the stables the vegetable-garden and chicken-house and the general's

We Prepare to be Pastoral

kennels lay in an unshaded hollow, and at the side the flower-garden was putting forth its first profusion of roses when the expected visitors arrived.

Adjoining Fortmounthouse, and exhibiting a mournful shabbiness, beside which the unshaven lawns of the neighbors seemed trim and well cared for, Mr. Floyd's great gray stone castle overlooked the river, and dominated the view for miles around, a lasting monument to the folly and extravagance of the builder. On this vast and pretentious house, the solid wall of masonry fronting the street, the magnificent stone and wrought-iron gateways, where the gates now hung loose from their hinges, and the overgrown labyrinth of evergreens, Mr. Floyd had squandered a fortune, of which barely enough now remained to enable him to live comfortably in half a dozen rooms of his palace, and to give poor Mrs. Floyd one good gown a year. Her own legacy from her father sufficed to pay taxes and interest on mortgages, and to make Bobby an allowance, without which he would have fared badly, as he was that luckless being, a lawyer without a client. The mistress of Graystone was an object of secret pity, especially when her state was contrasted with that of her widowed sister, Mrs. Percival, who had not only succeeded in retaining her own fortune, but had been blessed with a husband who, whatever his failings may have been, had showed himself sufficiently obliging to die, and die rich. Mrs. Floyd's nerves were her one luxury and diversion, and she revelled in them. She celebrated every anniversary with an ebullition

A Victim of Circumstances

of them. They overcame her when Bobby came and when he didn't come, at weddings and funerals, at tea-parties and at church. In fact, Mrs. Floyd's "attacks" were one of the features of the neighborhood, and the only offence she could not bring herself to pardon was a failure to treat them with proper seriousness. She was a tall, amiable woman, with a pretty, silly face. Her husband was short and slight, and had a passion for gardening, and for having his meals served on the minute. Living under the perpetual silent reproach of rows of closed doors and blank windows, he was meek and subdued, and pottered about between his formal rows of box hedges with an air of self-effacement.

Paul, the Trevors' fat white pony, stood before the door, and from the carriage alighted not only Trevor and Courtenay, but Mr. Floyd the younger, who had elected to drive up from the station with them. Spriggy stood on the steps, smiling and hospitable, while Madam Trevor awaited her guests in the library, a widow's cap crowning her august head, a well-worn black silk draping her little stout figure. Behind her, suddenly shy, stood a young person of slight stature, with large brown eyes, waving golden hair, and a deep dimple in her left cheek, at whom Mr. Floyd made a rush, and whom he shook violently by both hands, exclaiming with volcanic force, "Well, Clip— Bless the child! She grows prettier every day of her life. Glad to see me, eh? Pleasant surprise? Well, I promised you, didn't I?"

Roy followed him in a more leisurely fashion,

We Prepare to be Pastoral

and greeted his little cousin with less effusion, and Courtenay received his introduction with a visible blush. He was still a little shy, and her beauty had burst upon him very suddenly. He was afraid, too, of the old lady of whom he had heard so much, and who was at once so grand and so shabby. He looked towards Spriggy as to a protecting guide whose kind hand alone could lead him through these new perils. Mr. Floyd alone displayed no awe in the presence of the magnate, but greeted her with sprightly comments on her improved appearance. "You've been growing stout," he said. "You must have gained at least twenty pounds since last summer. Jim is running to legs, I see. Spriggy has a fine color, and as for Clip—" here he rolled his eyes in a manner which caused that young person to flounce indignantly in her corner behind her grandmother, and to cast a glance of withering scorn at him from the shadow of her long, dark lashes. It was only after his departure that she could be induced to join in the conversation, and to walk out on the bluff with Roy, Spriggy having taken Courtenay under her wing.

Trevor talked to her kindly and patronizingly. "I believe you have grown an inch since April," he said to her

"The fact is that I have not grown a hair's-breadth for a year," she replied indignantly; "and if I had, why do you talk to me as though I were nothing but a baby?"

Roy laughed. "In ten years' time," he said, "you won't stand so much on your dignity."

A Victim of Circumstances

"That remains to be seen," said his cousin, severely.

"You have an awfully pretty prospect," said Courtenay.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Spriggy. "We will drive along the bluff to-morrow. We are invited to luncheon at Mrs. Percival's on Thursday, and to Mrs. Floyd's for Sunday night tea. But it is dull here, very dull."

"It seems to me more like home than any place I have seen yet," said Courtenay.

"Shall I put on my blue muslin to-night or keep it for an emergency?" Miss Trevor asked later, with her little, fair forehead puckered into an anxious frown.

"Put it on, by all means," Spriggy advised. "Don't wait for emergencies. You know we never have them. After you have once made your impression you can wear sackcloth and ashes, and they will consider them becoming."

Dinner was unusually lively that night, and Miss Trevor, in pale blue, with a cluster of pink roses on one shoulder, was most ravishing to behold. Roy regarded her critically during the repast. When she left the room he pulled back her chair for her, and said under cover of the general commotion, "I see you have put on your war-paint. Was it all for Courtenay?"

She gave him another withering glance from her great brown eyes, which at that time dealt more in the artillery of scorn than in those softer aspects which afterwards became them so well. She was

We Prepare to be Pastoral

very young, and still restive under the admiration which she craved, resenting indifference, and repelling partiality. Trevor was amused by her magnificent disdain, and watched her with growing interest for the remainder of the evening.

CHAPTER V

THE PROGRESS OF MR. COURTENAY

WHEN the gong sounded for luncheon the entire party (Madam Trevor always excepted) stood surveying the newly rolled tennis-court, where Paul had been travelling all the morning in leather shoes. They had driven to Milford early that morning with the carryall and the old brown horses, and Mr. Floyd had commenced his usual summer programme of directing such mild revelry as the spot afforded. Now he said, "I haven't been asked, but I think I'll stay to luncheon." He climbed the terrace, and accosted the magnate, who had taken up a commanding position on the side piazza. "I smell hot biscuits, don't I?" he asked; "and our cook makes awful ones, so I told my mother she wouldn't see much of me at luncheon, for I know you're always glad to have me stay."

"I trust that *my* cook may afford you satisfaction," said Madam Trevor, dryly. "Tell your mother that if she would like to send her Julia to me I will be happy to have Kate teach her any little dish on which she fails. It is a pity you shouldn't be able to lunch at home, when you see so little of your mother all winter."

The Progress of Mr. Courtenay

Mr. Floyd, quite unabashed at this cool reception, took his seat at the table and fell upon the biscuits with avidity. Spriggy, rebuked for running about in the sun without a hat, listened submissively to her grandmother's criticisms, and Clip, still smarting under Bobby's teasing, which had commenced with his arrival and continued without cease, looked as sulky as so pretty a young person could. Jim suddenly announced to his sister, "I say, Clip, I can't drive you to Mrs. Percival's to-morrow, for I've promised Dan Turnbull to go fishing with him."

"Must I remind you that I dislike that Turnbull boy?" his grandmother inquired warningly.

"It isn't the one you mean. It's his brother," said Jim. "He is very well-behaved. Why, he asked me to bring my sister along."

At this innocent speech Mr. Floyd and Trevor burst out laughing. "How old is the Turnbull boy's brother?" Bobby inquired.

"About seventeen," said Spriggy.

"Young man," said Bobby, turning gravely to Jim, "don't attribute this sudden affection of the Turnbull boy to your own attractions. Be warned that his blandishments are lavished upon you for the sake of your sister's *beaux yeux*."

Clip sat indignantly pink and scornful amid the general howl which followed this indiscretion, in which only Courtenay and her grandmother failed to join. Her heart went out in gratitude to the young man who had refrained from siding with her persecutors.

"I trust Marjorie has been too sensibly reared to

A Victim of Circumstances

heed such nonsense," said Madam Trevor. "What do they propose doing with you this afternoon, Mr. Courtenay?" There was an ominous glint in the old lady's eye, which boded ill for Mr. Floyd's future welcome.

"We are to go out on the water," said Courtenay.

"Floyd's Pond, or the river? I should advise you to wear something that can't be injured in either case, for the boats are leaky," said Madam Trevor.

"We shall try the pond this afternoon, and the river this evening," said Roy. "There is a full moon, so you needn't worry about us." Moonlight excursions were prohibited, as he well knew, but he was also aware that his grandmother found him nearly perfect, and he made the most of his favor.

"I shall sit in the stern and steer," said Mr. Floyd.

"You don't know how," Clip declared. "You keep jerking the ropes and taking us miles out of our course. I shall steer myself."

"Well, I don't mind," he answered. "I only wanted the seat with a back to it, but you can have part of it if you'll promise not to hold my hand."

"Bobby Floyd, I'm astonished at you!" said the magnate. "It may be the fashion nowadays to behave like a tavern lounge, but I decidedly object to having such manners brought into my house, and only my regard for your poor mother induces me to give you an opportunity of doing better in future."

"I didn't say anything," he protested. "You know how well I *can* behave when I try"

"Bear it in mind, then," said Madam Trevor, severely, as they rose from the table.

The Progress of Mr. Courtenay

Clip had fled from her tormentors, and Courtenay found her on the stairs, soothing her ruffled feelings with a family of kittens. "It was disgusting, their bothering you so at table," he said. "Of course, they meant no harm, but nobody likes to be laughed at."

"It's all that hateful Bobby," she declared. "I wish grandmamma would forbid him the house, and I'm sure I don't see why she endures him. I suppose, though, that Roy and Spriggy would beg him back—hateful little wretch."

"I can't see anything amusing in him myself," said Courtenay, "but I suppose it's because I'm such a stupid beggar."

"I am stupid, too, then," said Clip, "for I detest his jokes."

"I hope you are not thinking of staying at home this afternoon," he said, seeing that she had exchanged her boating flannels for a ruffled muslin frock.

"I certainly don't want to go if I am to be tormented as I have been all day," she answered.

"But I won't let him annoy you," Courtenay protested.

"It's all very well to talk about 'letting' Bobby," she objected, "but you must see that even grandmother can't stop him when he makes up his mind to say things."

"Oh, don't stay at home. It would be too bad," he protested. "If you will walk over with me I promise not to let him come near you, and you know I couldn't chaff anybody to save my neck. Besides, I see nothing to joke about, myself."

A Victim of Circumstances

"No sensible person could," said Clip, somewhat mollified. "I believe you are right. I won't give him the satisfaction of keeping me at home. Will you take these kittens for a moment, while I get ready?" She deposited the interesting feline family on his knees as she rose, and ran up-stairs, just brushing his cheek with her crisp ruffles as she passed. He picked up the squirming, innocent-looking things, which clung with their sharp claws to his coat sleeve, and their owner, glancing down at his awkward manœuvres, called out to him, "You are holding that poor little yellow one upside down."

Spriggy came to his relief, and took the kittens into her own lap, while the mother rubbed against her and purred, and Courtenay fondled the tiny cats as an excuse for remaining near her. "You are awfully fortunate, having so many cousins," he said. "I never had any myself—none but Roy, I mean. Of course he has been awfully good to me, but here you seem more like brothers and sisters."

"And squabble accordingly," said Spriggy. "It is too bad of Roy to tease Clip so, but he doesn't realize how he and Bobby annoy her. He is very fond of her, really, and of course a man can't understand as another girl can how miserable it is to have no mother. You see it makes us very near to each other. Just think, I can't remember my mother at all. She was only twenty-four when she died."

"I can remember *my* mother—oh, very well indeed!" said Courtenay. "She died while I was at the crammer's, just before I got my commission. She

The Progress of Mr. Courtenay

was always very good to me—I didn't realize how good until afterward." He stroked the kittens in silence for a moment, then broke out with, "If I had a sister I should like her to be just like you."

"Would you, really?" Spriggy asked, flushing with pleasure. "Do you know, that is the nicest thing that ever was said to me, but I'm afraid I don't deserve it. But if there is ever anything that you would ask a sister to do, come to me and I will try to be as good as you think me."

"Then, if you don't mind, I'd rather you called me Reggy," he said, awkwardly, his real gratitude paralyzing all formal acknowledgment of a kindness which he thoroughly appreciated. "Nobody does here, and—I should like it. You see, it's what she used to call me."

"I will, then," said Spriggy, touched by the young man's simplicity and loneliness. Mr. Floyd, all unabashed by his recent rebuff, was calling loudly from the door, and Roy appeared with a sunshade in his hand, to protest against undue haste. They were all obliged to wait for Miss Trevor, who declined to hurry her toilet, and took a malicious pleasure in delaying the expedition.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH TREVOR IS IMBUED WITH THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

ON Thursday, as Miss Harcourt was pinning her hat before the mirror, her cousin came into the room with an indignant face. "It is just as I expected," she said. "I happened to look out of my window just now, and there was Bobby walking across the lawn. I knew perfectly well last night that he wouldn't bring his own horse, and that he would manage to tack himself on to us in some way. Grandmamma said the first thing this morning that we couldn't have Paul because she is sending him to be shod, and there isn't room for another person in the carryall."

"He will have to ride on the step, then," said Spriggy. "I told him we couldn't take him."

"It's a perfect persecution," said Clip. "Just as grandmamma is beginning to let us live like other people, he must needs go and spoil it all. You will have to get some other girl in my place if you can't keep him in better order. As it is, I think I'll walk."

"But it's so hot, and you will get your shoes so dusty," Spriggy protested. "I should hate to have Mrs. Percival see me the least dishevelled, she is

Trevor Imbued with the Spirit of Prophecy

always so perfectly dressed herself. Who would ever imagine that she was poor Mrs. Floyd's sister?"

"I believe Mrs. Floyd cries all over her clothes, and that is what makes them so crumpled," said Miss Trevor. "I feel sure she will treat us to an attack on Sunday night, but I should be sorry to have Mr. Courtenay go away without seeing one. We have so few amusements to offer."

Being a young person of considerable determination, Miss Trevor adhered to her plan of walking, and Courtenay walked with her. They took a short cut across the fields, and waited for the others on a shady bit of the stone wall which separated Percival's meadow-land from the main road. The carryall was slow in coming, as the parting address of Madam Trevor had been long and strenuous, and the two young people fanned themselves with leaves, whistled on blades of grass, and comforted themselves in a generally childish manner. "Is that the carryall coming out of the place now? I don't see how they got here without passing us," said Clip. "Why, no, it's a buggy."

"That is a good horse," said Courtenay.

"Yes. They always have good horses. I wish I had a few of them in our stable," she answered. "Who is driving, I wonder? Why, it must be Sidney himself."

It was indeed Percival, already late for the train which was to bear him back to town, driving like Jehu, and only too anxious to escape his mother's lunch-party. As he dashed out of the gate his horse shied at the young people on the wall, and executed a

A Victim of Circumstances

pas seul in the road. Percival looked at them, bowed, looked again—and lost his train.

The entire company was assembled on the broad veranda when he came back from the station. "Can you endure my society for the afternoon?" he inquired, as he mounted the steps. "I couldn't make up my mind to leave you."

"Now send for your things, like a sensible boy, and stay with your poor old mother," said Mrs. Percival, who looked thirty-five, and presented an unwrinkled front to an admiring world, thanks to her genius for shifting unpleasantness.

Spriggy beamed upon him, but Clip received his welcome and the renewal of his acquaintance with the utmost coldness, and sat quietly in her chair, a pretty piece of white-and-gold rigidity. Her curling lashes made little semicircular shadows on her pink cheeks, and, while the others laughed and chattered, her pretty lips were never once guilty of a spontaneous remark.

"I am afraid I startled you, coming out of the gate in such haste," said Percival.

"Oh, no, I am not afraid of horses," she said.

"Do you and Spriggy ride as much as ever?" he asked.

"We have nothing now but Paul and one of papa's broken-down chargers. Grandmamma won't stable any more."

"That is unkind in her. Perhaps we can do better for you. I am sending up a couple of saddle-horses this week. The truth is, mother has a new English habit in which she looks eighteen, and now

Trevor Imbued with the Spirit of Prophecy

she needs a mild little bay, with the disposition of a cow and the air of a demon."

"Something that prances and jumps, and wouldn't run if you were to set off a firecracker under it," said Mrs. Percival. "I can't run the risk of losing that famous youth of mine through anxiety for my life and limb. Isn't he disgraceful, Mr. Courtenay? You show more respect for your elders in England, I am sure, and make them longer visits. This is the first time Sidney has set foot in this house for three years. He came last night, because I telegraphed for him; and what do you think the message was?"

"'I have eloped. Mother,'" Mr. Floyd suggested.

"Oh, no. He would never have believed that," said Mrs. Percival.

"It was far more harrowing. It got on my nerves," her son declared. "It was 'Fearful situation. Impossible to explain. Must see you at once.' So I left my soup unfinished, seized a collar and a pair of black gloves, and precipitated myself towards the catastrophe, only to find that there wasn't any."

"Well, it certainly *is* a fearful situation to be left all alone in this barn of a house, when the people you expected have disappointed you, and the gardener looks as though he might turn into a raving maniac at any moment," said Mrs. Percival. "Really, I am in mortal terror of that man. He goes about muttering to himself all day long, and I haven't slept since I noticed it. I dared not dismiss him myself, and if Sidney had not come I was going to telegraph for his uncle."

A Victim of Circumstances

"Why didn't you send for me?" Mr. Floyd demanded.

"I was afraid that neither you nor your father would be firm enough," said Mrs. Percival, laughing. "I remembered that you had been twenty-five years getting rid of McCloskey."

"What are you going to do with a fellow like that?" Mr. Floyd inquired. "Every Sunday morning, as regularly as clockwork, father finds him tacking about the labyrinth, too drunk to get out, so he leads him forth with the rake, and tells him that this really *is* the end, and that he is to go and not come back. Then on Monday morning father goes out to the garden as usual, and there is McCloskey, working away as if nothing had happened, and father never says a word. Madam Trevor has written him three notes about it, and I expect any day to see her call in person and send us all about our business."

"And then Sidney proposed going directly back to town," Mrs. Percival went on, not heeding the interruption. "After all my pains to get him here!"

"Send for Edgarda Lynchester. She has the reputation of never letting go of any man whom she has once marked for her own," Mr. Floyd suggested. "If she gets him into her clutches there will be no escape for him."

"Don't expose me to it, I entreat you," said Percival. "I'm afraid of women, especially when they are artistic, and wear buttons on their elbows, and things like that."

"She isn't æsthetic any more," his mother as-

Trevor Imbued with the Spirit of Prophecy

sured him. "She walks four miles a day, in calf-skin boots, and has an eye on the Rectory."

"And grandmamma has an eye on her," said Spriggy.

At luncheon Clip was seated at Percival's right hand, and, finding him most deferential, she forgot her feud with all mankind, and blossomed forth suddenly into an adorable and confidential frankness. When thus disarmed into naturalness and no longer stiff with repelling coveted yet unwelcome attention, she became positively fascinating, and replete with those little airs and graces for which her beauty furnished the needful excuse. During the past few days she had awakened to a novel self-consciousness, which in her immaturity she had been unable to conceal, but her neighbor had beguiled her into temporary forgetfulness of her newly found and unmanageable dignity. It made very little difference to him what she said—whether she spoke or was silent. "She's desperately pretty," he thought, and was well satisfied merely to look at her. He heard with his eyes. After luncheon he took her through the stables, and strolled about the grounds at her side. She was much gratified at his manner, and glad moreover that this triumph of acknowledged young-ladyhood should be witnessed by the odious Bobby, and by Roy, who, apart from his patronizing manner, was not wholly detestable. Why could they not take pattern by Percival, and treat her with the deference due to her age and ambitions?

"It's going to be another moony, spoony night,"

A Victim of Circumstances

cried Mr. Floyd, standing under the row of Lombardy poplars, because of which the late Mr. Percival, an obstinate man, had persisted in styling his place "The Cedars." "Now if Sidney had any appreciation of nature he would send down to engage Billy Lee's sloop and take us all sailing this evening."

"And this from a person who declares that cherry-trees in blossom always remind him of children with the measles!" said Spriggy.

"It's not a bad idea," said Percival. "Will you all come if I can get the sloop? I think mother will chaperon us if we ask her prettily."

"How easily you take to our simple pleasures!" said Trevor. "We shall see you driving the horse mower yet. I always told you that you had a taste for the pastoral."

"Oh, when he can't get away, he makes the best of it," said Mr. Floyd, tactfully.

"Miss Trevor, do you think your grandmother will let us go?" Percival inquired. "Mother will write a note and promise to take the best possible care of you. I'll have the sloop brought around to your wharf, so that she can see us start."

"And to convince her that we have a duenna on board," said Trevor.

"And we'll have something hot and substantial for supper," Mr. Floyd affirmed with relish. "And as it's a romantic occasion I'll take my auto-harp along."

"Oh, in pity's name, desist! Sidney, have you heard him play that instrument of torture? Can't

Trevor Imbued with the Spirit of Prophecy

you prevent it? It will drive us overboard," said Trevor.

"What's a sailing party without music?" Mr. Floyd demanded. "Anyhow, this is *my* party. Nobody would have thought of it if it had not been for me, and I rather fancy that I shall take what I choose. Madam Trevor will tell us that we must be back by ten o'clock, but the beauty of a sailing-party is that you can always get becalmed."

"But you can't always get believed," said Spriggy, "especially when it happens to be blowing a typhoon on the heights."

"What can she do? Lock the door in your faces? It is astonishing to me how every mother's son of you kotows to Madam Trevor," said Mr. Floyd, defiantly. "I'm the only one who isn't afraid of her. You take the wrong course with her. All she needs is a lesson or two. You saw her try to send me home the other day, and did I go? Not much!"

Armed with a note from Mrs. Percival the party walked home in the cooling afternoon, and Roy undertook to gain his grandmother's consent to the plan. He strolled at Clip's side, with a newly awakened sense of her attractions. Her piqued manner, her swift flashes of scorn, and her much-paraded indifference had hitherto merely amused him. Now he began to find them interesting, especially since Percival had testified his admiration. Spriggy was undoubtedly much better company, and Clip's frigidity would have been odious in a plainer girl, but in this case it might be worth

A Victim of Circumstances

a man's while to bear with the thorns for the sake of the rose they encompassed.

"That was really an excellent idea of Bobby's," he said. "No exertion, no bother. Last night I had in decency to take my turn at the oars, but this evening I shall have nothing to do but look at you."

"I doubt whether you have even that occupation," said his little cousin, "for grandmamma will probably insist on my staying at home."

"I sha'n't allow her to insist. If you stay, I shall stay too, and we will walk on the bluff until twelve o'clock."

"You may walk there alone," said Clip.

"May I? Then I will go with the rest, and talk to Spriggy," he answered, with unruffled amiability. "It will be rather hard on Courtenay, but I can't make a burnt-offering of myself more than twice a week."

"I don't see why Bobby doesn't give his own parties," Clip observed, severely.

"Sidney doesn't seem averse to giving this one for him," he said. "Really, do you know, you're hard on Bobby. You are hard on all of us. What is the use of being such a little iceberg? You don't seem to realize that I could be awfully fond of you if you would only give me a chance."

"I don't wish you to be fond of me," said Miss Trevor.

"Don't you like me?"

"I don't like your actions," she replied, promptly.

"But what have I done? Haven't I been leading a beautiful bucolic existence under your very eyes?"

Trevor Imbued with the Spirit of Prophecy

"You are very disrespectful. You make fun of me to my face. I fail to see anything ridiculous in my appearance," she said, indignantly.

"You are so ridiculously pretty!" he explained.

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded, on the verge of tears. "I have two eyes, a nose, and a mouth, like other people, but from the way you and Bobby act one might suppose I was a Fiji-Islander. It's a shame."

"But, my dear little cousin, you surely must understand," he began, soothingly, but she cut him short.

"'Dear little cousin,' indeed! I am seventeen, and as tall as I ever expect to be. Other people realize that I have a right to be treated with some consideration, but when I am with you I feel that I must be an Albino, with pink eyes and no feelings."

"Your shoe-strings are dragging," said Trevor. "Let me tie them for you." With sublime disregard for his flawless attire he knelt by the roadside to knot the loose lacing. "My respected and revered relative, behold me here on my knees, imploring your gracious pardon for any levity which I may unwittingly have displayed."

She stamped her foot. "Get up," she said, "and don't be absurd. The others are over the hill already, and I'm sure I sha'n't forgive you if you stay in the dust all day."

"I can dispense with their society for the present, and I trust you can," he said. "Your other shoe will soon be untied. You had better let me fasten it."

A Victim of Circumstances

You have a very pretty little foot, my respected cousin Marjorie."

"I should hope it was not a large one," she said. "Now it is fastened, and I have no further need for you—so get up."

Trevor rose with deliberation from his supplicating posture, and flicked the dust from his immaculate garments with his handkerchief. "I fear you must be a very unforgiving young person if such an abject apology fails to reinstate me in your good graces," he said.

"You are not in earnest; you're not sorry. You only stayed behind to tease me," Miss Trevor declared.

"You do me injustice, Clip. I stayed because I wanted to talk to you. You know that I'm fond of you."

"You are fond of nobody but yourself," she returned promptly.

"Since I'm in for it, you might tell me a few of my other failings," said Trevor. "A monster of selfishness. What else?"

"You are so lazy. Why didn't you offer to help Mr. Courtenay look for lodgings in the village, instead of letting Mr. Percival do it, when you know he is only here for a day or two?"

"Courtenay need not be in such a hurry to leave the house. I'm in no haste myself," said Trevor. "It won't hurt Sidney to run about a bit. He has nothing else to do nowadays, lucky dog!"

"Why is he more lucky than you, then?"

"Because you treat him better than you do me."

Trevor Imbued with the Spirit of Prophecy

"He, at least, is civil to me."

"His main object in life is to complete his set of Viennese enamels—after that, to gratify his penchant for school-girls," said Trevor, who had in his own mind allotted his friend to his cousin Rose. "No, it won't hurt him to take a little exercise."

"If you are ever half as nice as he is, you will have cause to congratulate yourself," said Clip. "You think of nothing in the world but your own comfort and amusement. If it diverts you to be rude, you don't care a straw how much you hurt people's feelings. You are worse than Bobby, for you know more than he does. I don't know what sort of girls you have been accustomed to, but if they let you talk to them as you talk to me, I have no great opinion of them. It isn't even so much what you say as the way you say it—it's beastly!"

Trevor was surprised and a little offended at this outbreak. "This is my unfortunate day, it seems," he said.

"Oh, I know that grandmamma thinks you perfect, and I don't wonder that it turns your head," Clip admitted; "but I must decline to be treated as though I were a child or a fool."

Trevor, at this faint excuse for his conduct, was guilty of the indiscretion of laughing aloud—a folly which sealed his fate. "I hate you!" she cried. "I despise you, and I hope that some day I can make you just as unhappy and uncomfortable as you have made me."

Her eyes were flashing and the color came and went in her cheeks. She held her little head high

A Victim of Circumstances

and looked taller than she was. He surveyed her with a mingled admiration and anger of which he had hardly thought himself capable. He laughed at her indignation, and chose to treat the outburst as a childish whim; nevertheless, he was not altogether ironical when he answered, "Upon my word, Clip, it's not at all impossible that you may succeed, some day."

CHAPTER VII

SHOWS CERTAIN OLD-FASHIONED NOTIONS REGARDING THE EFFECTS OF THE MOON TO BE NOT ALTOGETHER ERRONEOUS

SINCE the days of the Highland costumes, Madam Trevor had cherished a conviction that, if her favorite grandson fell short of perfection in some minor details, the fact was distinctly attributable to Percival's bad influence. A boy so badly brought up, trailed about the globe with a succession of tutors at the heels of an errant family, left for a few months at a time in foreign schools, and turning up periodically at Fortmounthouse with a new language and fresh acquirements to unsettle the boys of the neighborhood, could hardly be expected to exert a salutary influence, and she did not blame the poor child himself for the injudicious training of his parents and the spoiling of his uncle and grandfather. If they chose to alternately neglect and indulge him, it was no affair of hers, and certainly his manners were too beautiful for a child of his age; but his reappearance was always demoralizing to Roy, and she labored unavailingly to discourage the intimacy. When, on his return from a sojourn in Madrid, where his

A Victim of Circumstances

grandfather held an important diplomatic post, he had introduced the new and exciting game of "Carlists" to the enchanted youth of Fortmount-house—a pastime subversive of clothing and furniture, and presumably of morals—she had actually deprived herself of a part of Roy's summer vacation and sent him back to his father. It is true that Percival, after using the mahogany library table as a blockade, had sent her a huge bouquet and a contrite letter, and she could not bring herself to dislike him personally; but when she discovered later that he and Roy had made their plans to room together at Harvard, her distress knew no bounds. Roy continued to adore him with a constancy which he did not often display, and it sometimes seemed to the indignant old lady that Percival did not even reciprocate, and rather accepted than returned, this ill-advised devotion. "In my young days," she said, "a young man made the Grand Tour once for all, and stayed at home ever after. There was none of this constant rushing to and fro. He saw what was to be seen, and that ended it."

"Well, I'm not going to do it any more, unless you treat me too unkindly here," said Percival. "All I need is an inducement to settle down and become a model to the community."

"There is plenty for you to do," said the magnate. "That fence of yours—"

"That is why I didn't come sooner," he protested. "I knew you would say that. I can't begin building walls, you know, unless you will let me go sailing."

Showing the Effects of the Moon

"For this one evening I have given my consent," said Madam Trevor, "but this is not to be considered a precedent."

Loud calls sounded from the wharf, where Mr. Floyd, who had come around in the sloop, was becoming impatient for the start. "I suppose it is cruel to keep Bobby in suspense," said Mrs. Percival. "Are you ready, girls?"

"Don't take cold," Madam Trevor commanded. "Sit still. Marjorie, put on your jacket before you leave the wharf. Tell Bobby not to upset the boat with his antics. Louise, don't let Sidney give the girls an elaborate supper. No, James, I have already said that you cannot go. It is your bedtime already, so let me hear no more about it."

Clip, moved by her brother's disappointment, was a little pensive as they glided up the river under the glorious moon. Courtenay consoled with her, while Percival arranged a comfortable seat of cushions and shawls for her accommodation. Mrs. Percival, Spriggy, Trevor, and Bobby, with more regard for their backs, had taken possession of the cockpit, where, to the great disgust of the latter gentleman, the conversation turned upon a book which he had not read. He accordingly repaired to the bow, whence in a few minutes proceeded the strains of the proscribed auto-harp.

"Shall I throw him overboard?" Percival inquired. He was sitting on a camp-stool, looking down at Clip, who was cuddled into a comfortable little heap among her cushions.

"I have decided that it is better to ignore him."

A Victim of Circumstances

said Clip. "Besides, we are all too comfortable. I wouldn't stir if I were sinking."

"You would make the nicest kind of a mermaid, with your hair all floating," said Courtenay.

"And the auto-harp to play on," said Clip. "See how well my plan has worked. He is tired of it already. He is going back into the cabin. Don't laugh. Jim and I call this our yacht."

"You are really fond of sailing, then?" Percival asked.

"Oh, I love it. It is the dream of my life to have a real yacht of my own, with brass railings and divans in the cabin. But, then, I want so many other things, too, and I know I shall never get them all."

"Tell us what they are," said Percival, invitingly.

"I want a really good saddle-horse," Clip began, gravely, "with at least five gaits, and as much afraid of the cars as your Harlequin. Then a new pony carriage and a pair of bays. A new piano, for ours is jingly. Then I want a whole roomful of new gowns, and some white slippers, with very high red heels, and a hotbed of violets to bloom all the year round. Oh! and unlimited money."

"Well, no doubt you will get them," said Percival. "I have heard people wish for more impossible things."

"No; I'm afraid I shall get none of them, unless it may be the slippers," said Clip. "I don't really expect them. What do you want, Mr. Courtenay?"

"A few acres here on the river," said Courtenay, "with a good house and enough money to give my wife everything she fancied."

Showing the Effects of the Moon

"I'll sell you mine cheap," said Percival. "It isn't a good house, but there's such room for improvement."

"Do marry somebody we can like," Clip entreated.

"One's friends never do," said Percival. "It's asking too much of them."

"You will like her, I can promise you," Courtenay assured her gravely. "I hope I shall like your fate as well."

"Nobody will like him. I sha'n't myself," said Clip. "He will be a captain of infantry, I think, and we shall live out West, in all the stupidest stations, and never get promotion. He will be detestably jealous, and won't even let me dance at the hops. Jim and I have it all settled. I shall go out to visit papa, and it will happen then."

"That will upset me terribly," said Percival. "But perhaps he won't live long."

"What do you want yourself?" she asked.

"I really don't know just at present," he answered. "I fancy I shall, though, if I stay in Fortmount-house much longer." He leaned forward to arrange the shawl at her feet. Courtenay's back was towards them. He was evidently star-gazing. "Since you can read your own future, suppose you tell me mine. What will she be?"

"Tall, I think. A little woman would look ridiculous beside you," said Clip.

"Are you sure of that?"

"She ought to be fair, because you are rather dark—but are you, after all?"

A Victim of Circumstances

"Neither one thing nor the other. A miserable medium."

"What sort of a temper have you?"

"Beastly—fiendish—anything you like."

"Have you a jealous disposition?"

Percival considered. "I ought to have, ought I not? Green eyes, you know."

"I don't believe you are jealous, then, or you wouldn't admit it," said Clip. "Well, Mrs. Percival may not be amiable to every one, but she will always be nice to you—possibly because she is a little bit afraid of you. And I don't believe you will care for her as much as she cares for you."

"Why shall I marry her, then?"

"Oh, you will be fond of her, after a fashion."

"You evidently consider me incapable of deep affection."

She took a lengthened survey of his face. "I think you are rather heartless; but I don't feel sure. I haven't known you long enough."

"All your life. It isn't very long, to be sure, but how could you have known me longer?"

"Yes; but it has been such a very short acquaintance, all the same," she persisted; "for since I was a little girl I have never talked to you until to-day."

"You liked me then," said Percival, "because I grovelled to you and brought you sugar-plums. Is there any simple way of pleasing you now, I wonder? Tell me about yourself, and what one should do to gain your good graces."

"You wouldn't find it worth the trouble," said Clip.

Showing the Effects of the Moon

"I'm quite willing to grovel now," he assured her.

"No, that would hardly be your style. You would be much more likely to order me about. You wouldn't be unpleasant about it, but you would manage to get your own way all the same. I believe you always make people do as you choose."

"How little you appreciate the beautiful docility of my nature," said Percival. "I am a very lamb."

"And you have just confessed to a bad temper," said Clip. "I fear you are not consistent. Now, I have a bad temper myself—indeed, all the Trevors have—and I know that *I* am not tractable."

"Put your coat on, as your grandmother advised when we started," he said with an assumption of authority. "You will take cold in that thin dress. You are very imprudent, Miss Trevor, and I have not been taking good care of you."

"I will put it on, just to prove to you that you always get your own way," said Clip as he held it for her.

"I am sure that your hands are colder than Greenland's icy mountains," he declared. "Let me see. I thought so." He held her hands imprisoned for a moment within his own, then relinquished them reluctantly. She flushed a little, and plunged them into the pockets of her coat. "You are not going to be angry with me, are you, Clip?" he asked. "There—it slipped out before I realized it. I have always remembered you as little Clip, and it is hard to break the old habit and think of you as Miss Trevor."

"One would imagine that you were quite in the

A Victim of Circumstances

habit of thinking of me," she said with lowered eyelids.

"And since this morning—" Percival began, then stopped suddenly. "Won't you let me say Clip?" he begged a moment later. "Even Bobby is privileged to call you that."

"You will say what you please," Miss Trevor replied, demurely.

"Thank you, but I wonder if you would let me say *all* I please?"

Courtenay, who had been sitting Turk fashion in the bow, now returned to the stern, where the tête-à-tête between his host and Miss Trevor for some unknown reason irritated his sensibilities. At his approach Percival, feeling that he had monopolized his latest fancy as long as good-breeding permitted, gave up his place and slid along the gunwale to the others. Courtenay promptly established himself upon the camp-stool. "I'm glad to see you well protected," he said. "The air is growing chilly. It is pleasanter here than it is forward. It's a shame in Floyd to make such a din on a night like this. You have been very quiet, though—you and Percival."

The volume of Mr. Floyd's voice gradually lessened, and the lower tones of Trevor and Mrs. Percival became audible. Miss Harcourt, who was naturally romantic when not carried away by animal spirits, sang little snatches of songs in a fresh soprano voice, and quoted the "Idyls of the King." "Oh, of course!" said Mr. Floyd. "All girls are alike. I owe Tennyson an everlasting grudge

Showing the Effects of the Moon

myself for putting ideas into their heads. An ordinary man won't do. They must have a solemn prig like King Arthur. Now, do you know the only person alive who is in the least like him? It's Percy Townshend."

"Poor Percy, we used all to thrash him! He was such a confounded prig we couldn't help it," said Trevor. "He might have licked us, too, but he thought it wrong to fight."

"King Arthur was too perfect," said Spriggy. "One likes a man whom one can forgive for something."

"Launcelot, of course," said Mr. Floyd. Trevor looked approvingly at his cousin. He found this a very pretty sentiment.

"We could most of us give you plenty to forgive," said Percival, "if that were all."

Courtenay kept silence, until Clip wondered at his lack of conversational powers, and noticed for the first time his moody countenance and his angry blue eyes fixed on her.

"Are you homesick or sulky?" she asked.

"Sulky, I suppose," he said, with a half-deprecating laugh.

"Well, it is rather shabby in Spriggy, but no doubt she will make up for it on the way back," said Clip, consolingly.

"I am not venturing to be vexed with Miss Harcourt. She has always been very kind to me," he answered.

"If it is Bobby, then, take your own advice to me, and don't mind a trifle," she said.

A Victim of Circumstances

"I am not offended with him. He is not worth the pains. I have no right to be offended at anything."

"Then don't look so gloomy," said Clip, "but tell me about it. We have been very good friends, and perhaps I can explain it."

"There is nothing to explain. I have no right to be angry," he repeated.

"I believe I must be the guilty one myself," said Clip. "What dreadful thing have I said or done? I really didn't mean to."

"I don't know what you've said. I don't know what you've done. I didn't listen or watch. I'm no eavesdropper," said Courtenay.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, beginning to stiffen again.

"Oh, it's of no consequence."

"Nonsense! You are just a pepper-pot," said Clip. "I believe Bobby *has* been misrepresenting again. I really haven't said a thing."

"He has nothing to do with it," said Courtenay. "And I suppose I haven't either. I'm a fool; that's all."

"You *shall* tell me!" Clip flashed out.

"Very well, then. I didn't know you were a flirt."

"I'm not," said Clip. "But what difference could it make to you if I were?"

"Oh, I realize all that. You needn't remind me of it," said Courtenay, vaguely. "Percival is a clever fellow, and a great swell, and has shown me no end of courtesy; but that doesn't alter the fact."

Showing the Effects of the Moon

I suppose you think me an ungrateful brute. I can't help it. And any one can see that he is a sort of a lady-killer."

"Nonsense," said Miss Trevor, with crushing emphasis. "Don't be absurd. It is a little early for you to advise me. I have known Mr. Percival all my life, and you five days. Besides," she added, relenting a little at the sight of his face, "haven't you his place?"

Thus, for the first time in her life, Miss Trevor became aware of her own power.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. FLOYD ASKS FOR FACTS

THE next morning was rainy, and Mrs. Percival remained in her room. Her son, being thus thrown upon his own resources, fell a victim to certain curious conscientious scruples regarding his own conduct and conversation on the previous evening. These qualms were first awakened by the sudden appearance of a young girl's regular profile on the page of the business letter which he was trying to write, and as the various trifling incidents of the sailing party passed in swift review through his memory—the nonsense he had talked in the stern and in the cabin, the return before a stiff breeze, with the moonlight growing whiter and fainter, the long, intimate talk with Spriggy, in which he had said much and confided nothing—he told himself that he was a contemptible object, and that the simple pleasures of the country were demoralizing to his sense of fitness, or, indeed, to any sense whatever. "It is the old woman's own fault," he said, trying to clear himself before the uncomfortable tribunal of his own thoughts. "If she didn't treat one like a devouring wolf, one wouldn't feel bound to do it." All the same, the dreadful fact remained that he had made

Mr. Floyd Asks for Facts

love to one, if not both, of Madam Trevor's granddaughters. He was not quite sure about Spriggy, and, in any case, she was evidently a young woman of experience and natural aptitude; but as to Clip there could be no manner of doubt. He did not alarm himself for her peace of mind, but it was disgusting to talk to a school-girl as one might to a woman of thirty, who expected that sort of thing. Practically he had no reason to imagine her susceptible; in fact, he fancied that he already detected traces of the destructiveness natural to a very pretty woman. But, theoretically, he had been guilty of a breach in his somewhat indefinite moral code, and, besides, he was more smitten with Miss Trevor's beauty than he chose to be with anything of so inflammable a nature. He told himself now severely that he had paid dearly enough for the knowledge that he was afraid of women, and that the glamour which moonlight and a touch of sentiment had thrown over the pink-and-white charms of a very young girl was unlikely to prove either lasting or serious. He supposed that he should have to marry some day—there was no hurry about it—and he trusted that he should have the luck to find a good, sensible girl, who would give him no trouble. Such a person he hardly hoped to discover among the Trevors, nor was he likely to benefit by a longer stay in Fortmounthouse.

Percival's conscience was a curiosity in its way, and as such he was in the habit of regarding it, but it was an oddity which cost him dear. It was never prophetic, only reminiscent. He had a real regard

A Victim of Circumstances

for the overbearing old magnate. She had provoked him into a defiance of her mandates, but now that the rebellion was accomplished he was willing to own her in the right. Not on the girls' account—oh, no! It would be absurd to imagine that they would ever take him seriously. It was the idea of the thing of which he thoroughly disapproved. He stood drumming on the window-pane and watching the steady downpour, a tall, finely built man, erect and athletic, holding his head with easy confidence in himself and his world. It was only in the face that a hint was visible of doubt and discontent—a certain hardness about the well-cut mouth, a fleeting sadness in the eye, a weary, listless manner of listening and answering, veiled by inborn good-breeding. It was a strong face to mask the follies of a weak nature—a face which seemed to sit in scornful judgment of the life it allowed itself to countenance and share. When a man with every instinct for good allows himself to drift with evil, the river-banks are not all flower-decked, nor can the voyage be wholly free from discomfort. This man was disgusted with many things, but most of all with himself.

He was glad when the Trevors' carryall drew up before the door, and Roy walked slowly up the steps, regardless of the pouring rain. "Now I can't go there," he thought, realizing for the first time what it was that he had wished to do. Trevor came in and settled himself with a pipe in the only lounging-chair the room afforded, with the evident intention of spending the morning. It soon became

Mr. Floyd Asks for Facts

plain that he had come with a purpose. "I was afraid that this flood would drive you back to town before I had a chance of seeing you again," he said, "and I was particularly anxious to consult you about that Atchison of mine."

"But, my dear friend, I know nothing whatever about stocks," Percival protested.

"Mr. Townshend does. Is he going to hold, or sell?" Trevor inquired. "Or is he going to buy more?"

"For three blessed weeks I have been in ignorance of Uncle Maturin's affairs," said Percival. "He has been able to go to auctions himself, and my presence was consequently not required. If he has disposed of any stock, Percy must have attended to it for him."

"I have only five hundred shares," said Trevor. "I don't imagine it is going much higher at present."

Percival reached for the paper. "You know I hate the whole business," he said, in a resigned tone.

"Yes, I remember," said Trevor, indulgently, "but I always like to talk things over with you. You may not know more about it than I do, but you always manage to show me my own mind."

"I didn't know that you had kept the place open for me," said Percival. "Who showed you your own mind when I was not on hand with my infallibility?"

"I had a dreary period of making it up for myself," said Trevor; "but that's over now, thank Heaven." He smiled with charming confidence at

A Victim of Circumstances

his friend, who had always lacked the heart to undeceive him. His perfect trust in the willingness of all the world to gratify and serve him had seldom been misplaced. He had always done whatever he pleased, and he prided himself upon his morals. If the ladies of his family persisted in believing him all he should be, it was through no intentional misrepresentation on his part, for he honestly believed the same thing himself, and sinned joyously and openly, seeing no evil in his own ways, and holding with his uncle, the general, that everything was permissible to a Trevor. He was blessed, moreover, with a perfect digestion, and went to church with assiduity. He was generous, good-natured, tolerant, the prince of good fellows, but any one who sought to take advantage of his laziness or negligence by attempting to overreach him was checked with a shrewdness and promptitude most unlooked for and disconcerting. For all his hatred of trouble he had a keen eye for business, and kept within his income. It is true that it was a large one.

Percival, who had loved him, admired him, and worked for him for years, found a return to the old ways natural, if a little irksome. He hated detail himself, and he had been burdened with it all his life. He was quite prepared to see Trevor take out a mass of correspondence regarding repairs, water-pipes, and roadways; nor were his fears without foundation. Three years' arrears of business and pleasure were waiting his attention and sympathy, for Trevor never wrote an unnecessary letter, but could not exist without a confidant of his own sex.

Mr. Floyd Asks for Facts

It was almost luncheon-time before he was ready to turn his attention to a kindly survey of his friend's affairs. "Is it true that you are going to build a new wall around the place?" he inquired. "Grandmother takes it for granted."

"She ordered me to build one," said Percival, "and if I were expecting to stay here, I should undoubtedly obey her behests; but as I may not come again for six months, and the estate isn't fully settled yet, I see no advantage in sinking another dollar in a place which I have half decided to sell."

"It seems a pity, though, when your people have had it so long," said Trevor. "I suppose, now, you would need some new stables, if you were going to live here?"

"Well, I'm not," Percival answered, with decision.

"Come to dinner this evening," said Trevor. "Grandmother is in a missionary humor, and longing for fresh victims. It is so well known on the bluff that she never calls on any one who doesn't attend St. Elizabeth's that there is no one left outside the fold for her to disapprove of, and she pants for a rebellion in the camp."

"Did she ask me?" Percival inquired.

"I am the bearer of a message to that effect," said Trevor. "She dines at half past six, and we hope you will be a little late, in order to give her a chance of firing the first gun. You have no other engagement here, you know."

"Fortunately, I haven't," said Percival, making up his mind on the spot to flee the country at his earliest convenience.

A Victim of Circumstances

Trevor had no sooner departed than Mr. Floyd appeared. "Fine day, isn't it?" he cried. "Mother wanted me to tell you that she shall count on you for supper Sunday night. I told her you said you were going directly back to town, and she had an attack. She feels very much injured that you haven't been to see her. She says it is because she has sunk into a social nonentity, and that her own people ignore her, and if she were an oil-queen from the ends of the earth she might look for some attention. I'm getting very tired of it, so I really think you had better stay over a day or so and come to the tea-fight."

"Oh, well, I'll come," said Percival.

"You look as though you'd lost your last cent," Mr. Floyd observed. "Did your supper disagree with you? That salad dressing had sugar in it, and if I ever go there again I shall speak to the man about it. If there's one thing more disgusting than another it is sweetened mayonnaise. The people here are barbarians. They don't know a salmi from corned-beef hash. The crabs were all well enough, but the ices were vile, and the champagne not much better. You had the best of the bargain last night. It was downright shabby in you to keep Spriggy to yourself all the way home. You know she's the only girl in the place I care to talk to."

"Don't be selfish," said his cousin. "I may not have another chance of seeing her this summer."

"Whose fault will that be, I should like to know?" Mr. Floyd demanded. "I tell you what it is, Sid,

Mr. Floyd Asks for Facts

I hope you have learned a thing or two from experience. I know enough of your little ways to see what is coming, and I warn you that it may be confoundedly amusing to play fast and loose with Madam Trevor's girls, but you'll find they are not that sort. I may as well tell you, too, that I'm fond of Spriggy myself."

"Good heavens," said Percival in tones of poignant disgust, "what beastly rot you're talking. Am I a destroyer of the female heart?"

"It looks rather that way," Mr. Floyd opined. "Anyhow, you talk to every woman you meet as though she were the only one in the world, and if you *did* happen to get hoisted with your own petard, it served you no more than right."

"My dear Bobby, I am fond of you," said Percival. "I am aware of the penalties I am obliged to pay for the pleasure of your society, and I trust I don't overestimate them when I say that I consider them sufficiently heavy already without additional frankness on your part. If we are to remain on good terms, we will abstain from discussing personal matters."

"Now I suppose you think I don't see that that is a polite way of telling me to hold my tongue," said Mr. Floyd.

"On the contrary, I am enchanted to find you so discerning," his cousin replied.

"You said something about our being on good terms," Mr. Floyd continued. "Now, one reason I came here to-day was to find out whether we were really on good terms or not. We weren't the best

A Victim of Circumstances

of friends before you went away, and I did think you might show a more decent spirit when you came back. A little matter of money ought not to stand between cousins."

"And you know perfectly well that it doesn't," said Percival.

"Well, then, I suppose it's because I said frankly to everybody that I knew you were not so much to blame as she was. There's gratitude for you! I stand up for a man through thick and thin, and tell nothing but the absolute truth about him, and by way of return he treats me like a pickpocket. After this I'll let things go. When I hear anybody say you acted like an unprincipled villain, I'll hold my tongue. They may think what they please. All I want to know is, is the row off or on?"

"If you have any further remarks to make, you might as well make them at once," said Percival, "for I don't particularly care about raking it up again. I don't deny that I was very much provoked at your talking, but I don't want to bear malice, and if you are ready to admit that you made a mistake—"

"Confound it, I'm no dirt-eater," cried Mr. Floyd, angrily. "I merely meant to say that I was ready to forgive and forget if you were."

"Might I inquire for what you propose to forgive me?" Percival asked, with lively curiosity.

"You've said a good many hard things to me," the indignant gentleman averred. "You've got an awful tongue, and I hate ridicule. I did my best to get you out of a scrape—and, Lord knows,

Mr. Floyd Asks for Facts

you needed help badly enough—and all the thanks I get are sarcastic compliments, by Jove! It's enough to make any one sick of the world."

"I didn't request your intervention, you know," said Percival. "You acted entirely on your own responsibility. I never, to my knowledge, mentioned the matter to you in any way."

"That's just what I'm telling you," cried Mr. Floyd. "That's just where you're the most to blame. If you weren't so infernally close-mouthed about your affairs, a person might know where he stood; but is it my fault if I blunder because I don't know the things I ought to be told, and have to draw my own conclusions instead of being confided in as one cousin should confide in another? No wonder Uncle Maturin thinks I have no tact, when I'm kept in the dark about everything I ought to know, and have to invent answers when I'm asked questions, rather than be mortified to death by admitting that I haven't been told what is going on in my own family."

"If you choose to proclaim *your* affairs to the four winds of heaven, I have nothing to say; but mine, whether real or fictitious, need not give you the slightest concern," said Percival, politely. "So we will say no more about it."

"There's just one thing, though," Mr. Floyd persisted, "and you must admit that I have a right to ask, considering all I did for you. Of course I know you don't appreciate it, but that's your fault, not mine. We all want to know—Uncle Maturin and Percy as much as I—if I am the only one who has

A Victim of Circumstances

the pluck to ask you point-blank: Where is she now, and are you going to marry her?"

Percival rose suddenly, and confronted his inquisitive cousin with a light in his eyes which Mr. Floyd knew of old, yet had not sufficient discretion to avert. The little man turned red, and fidgeted defiantly under the level wrath and scorn of his cousin's gaze, and an embarrassing silence fell between them. Percival was the first to break it. "I don't know what to do with you," he said, with a short laugh. "I can't thrash you, and I can't cut you, but I think I shall forego the pleasure of your society, beginning at this moment. Good-morning."

"See here," said Mr. Floyd, quickly, "I'm sorry I said anything. You never know how to take a friendly interest when any one is disposed to show it in you."

Percival stood by the door, obviously waiting to show his visitor out. Mr. Floyd turned very much redder, and cast a half-appealing glance at the man who was too powerful to thrash him, and too nearly related to break with him. "What," he said, with successful bravado, "would you speed the parting guest?"

A flicker of amusement lighted Percival's face, which encouraged the offender to fresh efforts. "Hang it all!" he cried. "I'm not unforgiving. I wish I had never had anything to do with the infernal business. Shake hands, and let it go at that."

"Am I to consider this in the light of an apology?" Percival inquired.

"Anything, for the sake of peace," said Mr. Floyd.

Mr. Floyd Asks for Facts

"Even discretion?" Percival asked, incredulously.

"Lord knows I'll never mention it again," the busybody vowed fervently and with a lightened heart. "And to show you that I harbor no malice, I'll stay to luncheon. Mother's cook gets worse and worse."

He departed, soothed by Moselle, but no wiser than when he came. Nevertheless he drew his own inferences. "He's a free man," he concluded, "and he's thinking of marrying. I hope to Heaven it's Clip."

F

CHAPTER IX

MISS HARCOURT PREACHES A SERMON

AIDED by the efficient Madam Trevor, Courtenay had transferred himself and his belongings to lodgings in the village, where he spent that portion of his time which he considered it due to his self-respect to pass away from the house on the hill. Roy continued to delight his grandmother by his presence, and Bobby came and went as his fancy dictated. He made a number of calls in the neighborhood, and appeared at length on the Trevors' piazza to flaunt his superior virtue in the face of their idleness. "Well, girls, here I am," he announced, flinging himself into the hammock. "Now, why haven't you a refreshing cup of tea to offer to the weary wanderer?"

"Because grandmamma won't allow us to have a tea-table," Clip responded, promptly.

"I'll speak to her about it. I know she won't object if it is properly put to her," Mr. Floyd averred. "Oh! I have a bit of news for you—something that will make Clip jump in her boots."

"I hope I shouldn't jump out of them," said Miss Trevor, severely.

"Wait and see," said Bobby, triumphantly. "There's going to be a party in Fortmounthouse!"

Miss Harcourt Preaches a Sermon

Clip's eyes widened with anticipation. "Are you sure?" she asked. "It isn't one of your jokes, is it?"

"Sure as fate; the Morgans are going to have it," he averred, forcibly.

"What kind of a party? Cards and music, I suppose," said Spriggy. "I wish they would ever have a dance."

"I was so carried away by my rapture at hearing that there was to be any at all that I never thought to inquire what kind it was to be," he confessed; "but one thing is certain—it will be a dry show. Cold water and lemonade, and a fearfully heavy supper to keep you awake all night."

"It is too hot to dance. Wilted collars and damaged crimps are things for which I do not madly yearn," said Trevor.

"I'd rather dance than play cards for nothing with a lot of old frumps, and listen to local talent in a stuffy room," said Bobby. "I like a good polka myself, and there's no place like this house for it. Come on, Spriggy, and see how many turns we can do the hall in. I'll bet you not less than ten."

"Play for us, Clip," said Spriggy, following her energetic caller into the house.

"Yes, let's have something lively, and with lots of *go* to it," cried Mr. Floyd, with a preliminary shuffle on the polished floor, as Clip obligingly took her place at the piano. Spriggy danced well, and Bobby with enthusiasm and agility. Together they slid and raced with untiring vigor, while Trevor leaned against the wall, declaring

A Victim of Circumstances

that it made him tired to watch them, and Clip laughed until she broke down in the middle of a bar.

"Go on. That was fine!" cried the unsatiated Bobby.

"No, she is tired, and so am I," said Spriggy, fanning her hot cheeks with Roy's straw hat. "Let me play for a while, until I get my breath, and give Clip and Lazybones a chance."

Somewhat to her surprise, Trevor actually responded to the invitation. "Will you try it, Clip?" he asked, very politely.

"Of course she will," said Spriggy, taking her cousin's place at the piano. "Go on, and don't waste the music."

"Play a waltz, then," said Clip. "We mustn't make him exert himself too much."

"When I made that unfortunate remark about wilted collars, I didn't realize that we were so soon to have a ball," said Trevor, putting his arm around her waist. "Fire ahead, Spriggy."

Clip's eyes were not quite on a level with his shoulder, and her little hand seemed to melt away in his as he held it. She looked at the floor; he glanced down at the close waves of golden hair which caught the late sunlight in gleams from her forehead to the knot low in her neck. Bobby stared at her admiringly as she flitted over the floor. "She goes like a fairy," he said to nobody in particular. He wished that Percival could see her, and find her more desirable than Spriggy.

"I didn't know that you had sufficient energy to dance," she said when they finally stopped.

Miss Harcourt Preaches a Sermon

"I shall do it oftener if I can dance with you," he answered, fanning her with a sheet of music.

"He never paid *me* such a compliment," said Spriggy. "Come, Clip, we must dress for dinner."

"The new red gown for Courtenay?" Bobby inquired.

"For all comers," said Spriggy from the staircase.

"Very well. I'll be over," said Mr. Floyd.

He returned later in the evening, bringing Percival. "We *had* to come," he explained. "We couldn't stand it any longer. It's mother's birthday, and she has an attack. Father and Aunt Louise are trying to stop the leak, and Sid and I got out."

Madam Trevor felt called upon to rebuke his unfilial grin, though in secret she scorned Mrs. Floyd's nerves. "Young people nowadays lack grace even to assume a decent consideration for their elders," she said. "The last generation ridiculed us behind our backs, but now it is done before our very eyes."

Bobby balanced himself on the railing, and took the field joyously. "I was just saying behind your back that to make this house an ideal place to drop in of an afternoon, you ought to have tea at five o'clock. Everybody else does it, and I expect it, and get a *gone* feeling about that time, you know"

"I don't doubt that your mother would allow you to have it," said Madam Trevor. "She seems to humor you in all your vagaries. For my own

A Victim of Circumstances

part, it seems an excellent way of spoiling one's dinner. I never approve of eating between meals."

"But I want it here, where the girls are," said Mr. Floyd. "Bless you, it won't spoil *my* appetite."

"Your appetite is not what concerns me," said the magnate. "I don't want all the young people in the neighborhood trapesing over my lawns and tracking dirt on to my piazzas, a great slop and waste of good tea and cake, and every one late for dinner. Why must you be forever putting notions into the children's heads? Only this morning I found a sticky glass on the library table, in which some one had been dissolving my cut loaf-sugar in water, but so stiff that a spoon would stand alone in it; and when I questioned James, he admitted that he had learned the wasteful trick from you. You all munch sweets from morning till night, without regard for your teeth or digestions—French candies, animal crackers, soda-water! In my day young people contented themselves with a moderate quantity of simple, wholesome fare. They didn't demand made dishes and entrées. At Marjorie's age I could have bought all my frocks for the money you fritter away in poisonous trash; but, for that matter, my clothes lasted much longer than yours, for I never was a harum-scarum tomboy. I obeyed my parents, did my own needlework, and comported myself as a well-born young woman should. Your lawlessness comes from the Trevor side, not from the Van Rensselaers."

"Oh, well, you know," said Mr. Floyd, argumentatively, "in those days the women laced until they

Miss Harcourt Preaches a Sermon

had no room inside them for a good square meal. They wore paper-soled shoes on the street, and thought it vulgar to look healthy, and the height of every well-regulated young woman's ambition was to have an unhappy love affair and go into a decline. We are more sensible nowadays."

"You are more forward, at all events," said Madam Trevor.

"And why do you find me so? Simply because I'm a single man," Mr. Floyd averred. "I'm old enough to be bringing up a large family of children to work samplers and die young; but because I have chosen the better part, and remain a bachelor, you make me a subject for your rebukes and revilings. I suppose I shall have to wait until I'm as old as Uncle Maturin before you cease to treat my opinions with disrespect, and then, ten to one, you won't be here to admit it, you know."

Courtenay's jaw dropped with horror at this outburst, and the rest could not forbear a deprecatory giggle at the preposterous idea of Mr. Floyd as the head of a family. Madam Trevor sniffed, and made no reply. She had been beguiled into an argument, and, as she seldom condescended to discussion, Mr. Floyd's fingers already clutched the victor's palm. "You can have the table in the north corner of the piazza," he said, airily, "and then the prevailing winds will blow the alcohol lamp away from the house. We'll have some of that chocolate cake we had the other day for luncheon, and little round plum-cakes, and—"

Madam Trevor raised her hand, and transfixed

A Victim of Circumstances

him with an awful glance. "When I am in my dotage, Robert, I may place my family and affairs in your charge," she said, "but for the present I hope to continue mistress in my own house. I wish you a pleasant walk home."

When these dreadful tactics were made plain, Mr. Floyd realized that he had gone too far, and fear smote him. "Rose, Marjorie, I will excuse you," said the old lady, and remorse clutched at his heart as banishment clouded the vista of a long summer full of delightful potentialities. To be thus separated from his beloved Spriggy, to know that his place would be promptly filled, caused him such apprehension that, despite his aversion to apologies, he cast himself metaphorically at the magnate's feet, and grovelled there. He told her in palliation of his offence that he had been badly brought up; that he always thought of her as being his own age; that he would never argue with her again; but would do anything, even to the wearing of heavier flannels, to regain her favor. The rest of the company, so summarily "excused," sat in the hall straining every nerve to hear the terms of Mr. Floyd's downfall. Madam Trevor finally came in alone, and announced, "Bobby has left me to make his adieux for this evening"; and none dared to inquire whether they were of a final nature or only the temporary eclipse of a foolhardy effrontery.

"Really, Bobby goes too far," said Clip, as her grandmother afforded them a brief respite by seeking a brighter light with her knitting. Though horrified at the event, she could not forbear a brief

Miss Harcourt Preaches a Sermon

satisfaction in the discomfiture of her ancient antagonist.

"And, really, grandmamma—" Spriggy suggested. It was the dawning of rebellion in a hitherto submissive nature—the blossoming of the magnate's successor.

"I wonder," said Percival, speculatively, "how long it will be before *I* bring down that wrath upon my devoted head?" He was lounging by the door with Spriggy. It was very damp and black outside, and the exiled Bobby's footsteps had ceased to crunch on the gravel walk. "It is as well for me, perhaps, that I don't care where I stay or how soon I leave the most agreeable spot on earth."

"That sounds as though you didn't enjoy doing the things you like best," said Spriggy.

"I don't," he answered.

"But why not? I never heard anything sadder," said Miss Harcourt. "Surely they are not *all* things that one should leave undone."

"No, I'm not as interesting as all that," said Percival. "My little failings are shockingly commonplace. I haven't sufficient imagination to make a successful villain."

"Sometimes I wish," said Spriggy, pensively, "that you thought me sensible enough to say what you really mean to me, without joking or paying me compliments when you are afraid the conversation is going to be a little serious or personal. I don't care to *frivol* all the time, and it seems a pity that when I do meet a man who is capable of doing something else he should hide his light under a

A Victim of Circumstances

bushel. I suppose I impress people as an empty-headed doll, who cares for nothing but dancing and dress; but I don't know how I am ever to improve my mind if I'm always treated as though I had none."

"Please don't have one," he entreated. "It's so forward in a girl of your age. What do you want me to tell you? Is it my editorial career for which you particularly pine, or my views on art? You know that if I had a headache or a heartache I should come to you for sympathy. Perhaps it argues a lack of sense that you would let me come."

"But are you sure that you would be willing to accept my sympathy? I mean, if the heartache were really a bad one," she said. "I believe you would be far more likely to go off somewhere by yourself and fight it out without saying a word to any one."

"I believe you think I am suffering from one now," said Percival.

"Not a bad one. But I imagine you are usually a little unhappy," she answered, "and you ought not to be."

"Why not? Isn't it one of the inalienable rights of man to make himself as miserable as he chooses?"

"It seems to me," said Miss Harcourt, a little severely, "that you have a great deal to make you happy. You are young and rich and talented, you have a mother who is perfectly devoted to you, and a name that any one would be proud to bear—"

"Even a Trevor?" he interpolated.

She flushed and laughed. "Even grandmamma herself. You have plenty of friends, and a long life

Miss Harcourt Preaches a Sermon

before you to live as you please best. I consider you a very fortunate man."

"It's very easy to be thankful for other people's blessings," said Percival. "I'm thankful for yours. But, seriously, Spriggy, I was not ungratefully repining this evening—only thinking. Thanks for the sermon all the same. I believe it is easier to run straight if you know that there is some one who expects it of you."

"I think every one expects it of you," she answered. "Your future is in your own hands. You are your own master, and there is nothing you can't accomplish if you really try."

"I don't want everybody to expect it. I only care about one," he objected. In the hall Trevor was instructing Courtenay and Clip in the rudiments of poker, finding a placid joy in the thought that the initiation was taking place under his grandmother's very nose. One of the strings of Spriggy's banjo snapped in the dampness. Percival seated himself on the steps to repair the damage. "I'm not my own master," he said, presently. "I think I have never cared to be. At all events, I have never half tried. But now I believe I could be, if I chose. I should like it."

"I am so glad!" said Spriggy, with soft enthusiasm.

"You have been very good to me. I should like to deserve it better," said Percival. "Don't believe in me too much, but don't give me up altogether, and I may return from Newport so regenerated that I need no longer fear being driven out of Paradise like poor Bobby."

A Victim of Circumstances

"I shall believe in you thoroughly, whether you like it or not," said Spriggy, "and you will be surprised to find how right I am." A glow of sentimental benevolence pervaded her soul. She loved every one whom she could help, and this was, besides, a most interesting sinner, and one not easily reached. Mr. Floyd's tragic exodus assumed a secondary place in her waking thoughts that night, and Courtenay for the first time found himself a little neglected. The ardent young missionary's only regret was that so short a time remained for the prosecution of her labors, and I am sure that she bears with her the sympathies of any lady who has ever engaged in the absorbing pastime of ameliorating the spiritual condition of a man about whom she has heard certain things.

CHAPTER X

PROVES THAT LUNAR INFLUENCE IS NOT ESSENTIAL FOR THE PRODUCTION OF MOONSHINE.

THE rain was falling in sheets on Monday morning when Mr. Floyd, humbly and on foot, approached those delights which his own folly had cast away. He did not come in, as the term of his banishment was to extend until Wednesday, but he left Spriggy's gloves, which she had forgotten the night of the high tea, and, meeting Courtenay on the steps, he sat on the piazza gossiping with him until the inhospitable aspect of the house convinced him that no sign of relenting was to be forthcoming, when he sadly spread his umbrella and departed. He had seen Spriggy the night before, but her daily society was necessary to his contentment, and he pined as well for her constant companions.

As Courtenay entered the library, where an open fire was blazing on the hearth, he found Trevor and Miss Harcourt fencing with parasols, while Clip sat demurely on a sofa talking to Percival.

"Here we are, cooped up in the ark, with the same old menagerie," said Spriggy.

"I thought one of the animals was leaving this

A Victim of Circumstances

morning," said Courtenay, none too well pleased at the sight of the other early visitor.

"That ceremony will be consummated at two-thirty," said Percival. "In the meantime I continue business at the old stand. Will you join the class in sabre-drill? I can offer you an umbrella or a crop, whichever suits your wrist."

"There are some foils in the attic. Clip, you know where they are," said Spriggy.

"It is so dark that I dare not go without a candle," said Clip, rising obediently.

"Let me carry the light for you," said Percival. "There may be rats or spiders, and I am sure you need a protector."

Courtenay glowered a little as they left the room. He was angry with himself for not having offered his own services sooner. Spriggy disappeared in answer to a message from her grandmother, and the young Englishman found himself alone with his cousin. "It is just as well that he's going," he observed, severely.

"Who? Sidney? Oh, I see," said Trevor. "Bobby has been talking to you. He is so indignant at being called down himself that he would enjoy seeing the rest of us in the same boat. I suppose he has been unearthing that old story again. There's a good deal of the ragpicker about Bobby."

"Then there *was* a scandal?" said Courtenay, a little triumphantly.

"Oh, that is too hard a word. Sidney was never sensational," said Trevor. "What is the use of raking up old gossip? I believe in letting by-gones

Moonshine Void of Lunar Influence

be by-gones. "There's no use in making a fuss over the old story of a fool and a woman."

"I thought it was the other way," said Courtenay.

"He was the greater fool of the two," said Trevor. "She threw herself at his head, and he took the consequences of it—that's all. I believe he would have married her, too, but her husband came into a lot of money, and she decided to go back to him. Sidney had none too much of his own then, you see. A bad lot, she was, and came near ruining one of the best fellows that ever lived. Bobby mixed himself up in it—he always does. There would have been no talk but for him."

"You like Percival?" said Courtenay.

"I believe I care more for him than for any two people living," said Trevor, "and you—don't."

"I have nothing against him personally," Courtenay began. "Only—"

"Oh, of course, I understand all that," said Trevor, lightly. "We all have to take our chances, you know, and yours is as good as anybody's, if you choose to think so."

"I don't see how you knew," said Courtenay, turning red.

"I had an idea that you were confidential," said Trevor. "If so, I'm encouraging you. If not, I'm talking nonsense. They are taking their time about those foils."

Percival, having lighted his fair companion up the garret stairs, set the candlestick on an old bureau, and seated himself on a trunk studded with brass-headed nails. "Won't you rest for a few min-

A Victim of Circumstances

utes after that climb?" he urged. "Confound the foils! Let them rest in peace. I am never so happy as sitting on a hair trunk and talking by the light of one candle. It is a pleasure I sha'n't have at Newport. I will keep the spiders away, and you can tell me a ghost story."

Clip took a packing-box instead of accepting his invitation. "Once upon a time," she began, "there was a girl who went into a dark and lonely place to get something that was wanted immediately, and a Person went with her to protect her from dangers. The roof leaked, and the rain fell into a tin pan with a most dreadful noise. The rafters were covered with cobwebs and great fat spiders, and the walls were full of rats two feet long, and it was cold and wet, and as black as pitch. Now, when this Person saw all these things he insisted on staying there; so the girl froze to death, and when the other people came to see what had become of her they found her lying in a cobweb shroud, while the remorseful Person had drowned himself in the pan of water."

"Mine is prettier than that, and not so tragic. I hope," said Percival. "Once upon a time there was a princess who was always so surrounded by her courtiers that it was impossible for an ordinary person to obtain an audience. Now, one of these ordinary persons was on the point of setting forth on a journey, and desired above all things to speak privately with the princess before he made his public adieux; but no matter how hard he tried, there was always some obstacle in the way. At length she announced her intention of making a pil-

Moonshine Void of Lunar Influence

grimage to a lonely and perilous spot, and he begged her to allow him to light her on her way, so that he might have one last opportunity to beg that she would be a little sorry for his departure, and think of him sometimes while he was away—”

“Why?” Miss Trevor inquired, with lively curiosity.

“So that when he came back to her she might find nothing unnatural or disagreeable in his staying. So that when he asked her the question that was in his heart she wouldn’t be startled and frightened, and hate him for disturbing her.”

“Let me finish it,” said Miss Trevor. “The knight went away to take charge of his own estates, and, being inconstant, forgot the princess in a week. She thought of him twice a day, until she grew tired of waiting, and then she began to think of somebody else who happened to be close at hand. And as he never came back, she never knew what his question would have been, nor how she would have answered it if he had asked it.”

“But surely she could guess,” said Percival.

“She was a stupid princess, and not good at riddles,” said Miss Trevor. “Please hold the candle so that the light will fall in that corner. Yes, there are the foils.”

Percival half laughed and bit his lip. He admired her all the more for the decided rebuff which she had given him, and he condemned himself for his absurd precipitancy. He was not even sure that he was in earnest yet, and he had almost made a declaration to her, which, young as she was,

A Victim of Circumstances

she had wit enough to fend off. Why had he tried to avoid her? For what reason, pray, was he about to leave Fortmounthouse? His part in the scene just enacted struck him as the height of folly, and hers as something peculiarly attractive. She was too young for him, and too good. Perhaps his fancy for her would prove as evanescent as those which preceded it. He was ashamed of himself, even while his heart protested, "But this is different." He felt that a new youth had suddenly opened before him at the sight of her face, a cleaner, healthier season than he had ever known. He forgot the degradation, the heaviness, of the past years; a late spring had blossomed in his heart at the soft casual glance of two brown eyes. But he was afraid of them, too, and said nothing more but, "I fear I am not a success as a romancer. Perhaps your ending is the best one, for the princess."

"You see, I am hopelessly practical," said Clip, dusting the foils. She looked distractingly pretty as she knelt under the candlelight, with her hair undulating in flecks of gold and her lashes casting shadows on her cheeks. "It is well you are so disposed," he thought, "for you certainly take the practicality out of other people."

The others were playing photograph whist on their return—a shockingly irreverent game, in which the cartes-de-visite of estimable great-uncles and aunts ranked as trumps and aces according to their respective ugliness. "It's mine," Spriggy declared. "You can't beat Mrs. Lee with the horns in her hair."

Moonshine Void of Lunar Influence

"Can't I, though?" said Trevor, triumphantly casting his trump upon the table. "Here's Uncle Frederic. Would you ask more than the joker?"

Courtenay found this a dreadful game, but he could not forbear a shocked titter at the openness with which the Trevors criticised the points of their relatives, and he found himself included in the condemnation of the magnate, who presently descended and put a stop to the unseemly diversion. Percival took this occasion to say good-bye. "Are you coming back for the Morgans' party?" Spriggy asked. "I don't know," he said, and bowed over Madam Trevor's hand. Miss Harcourt's mouth drooped a little at the corners, and Clip smiled at him unconcernedly as he opened the door, and so he took his departure.

CHAPTER XI

MR. COURTENAY IS LED THROUGH A LABYRINTH

MADAM Trevor stood on the terrace, bestowing her parting instructions upon the members of her household. The garden was full of the fresh smell of wet earth. The geraniums and lilies were beaten down and muddy, but there was not a cloud in the sky, and a brisk little breeze was doing its best to dry the heavy ground. Spriggy and Roy were starting for Milford, under the chaperonage of Jim, and Clip was to be the bearer of plants and messages to Mr. Floyd Senior. "In the basket," said the magnate, "are three snowballs, two small century-plants, and a lilac-root. I want two day-lilies and a variegated carnation. I will send him a slip of my German ivy, which I should advise him to plant by the kitchen windows, as the stone is badly discolored. Now don't stay loitering about, and don't bring Bobby back with you, for he knows that he is to come only three times a week."

Half-way down the path Clip met Courtenay, who had just come up from the village. "It is lucky for you that I came this way," she said, "for grandmamma is on the rampage. You were going over to Milford to help buy the fireworks, weren't

Mr. Courtenay Led Through a Labyrinth

you? Well, they had to start half an hour earlier than they intended, because the rain has put everything back, and so they couldn't wait for you. They were going to drive through the village in the hope of meeting you."

"I came by the short cut," said Courtenay, "so of course I missed them. Let me carry your basket."

"I am going to tell Mr. Floyd how he ought to manage his garden," said Clip. "Grandmamma sends him the most awful messages, and I should never dare to deliver them if he paid any attention to what any one says to him, but he never listens, you know. He doesn't care about anything but his Italian garden, and having his meals served on the minute. I don't see how he came to be Bobby's father."

"This would be a magnificent place if it were only kept up," said Courtenay, as they passed through the little green gate through which Bobby had been wont to make his daily appearance. "What a pity that it should have fallen into such ill repair!"

Clip began to laugh. "You see that arbor-vitæ hedge? When Jim and I were very little there was a garden party at the Floyds, in aid of the church, and everybody in Fortmounthouse went. Papa was at home on furlough, and he had been teaching us to ride by setting us in the saddle and giving the horse a cut, so that we had to stick on whether we could or not. I had a vicious little Indian pony, and I scoured the country wherever it chose to take me. That afternoon it started to gallop across the

A Victim of Circumstances

fields, and made directly for that hedge. I managed to keep my seat as far as the other side, but there he bucked, and I shot off into a group of people, slid against papa, and knocked him down. The ground was damp, too, and he was wearing a new suit of white flannels. He was so funny, and so furious, for he does love his clothes! He said I had disgraced him for life, and he certainly did look absurd, sprawling before all those ladies who had been hanging on his words."

"Do you think it nice to ridicule your father?" Courtenay asked, severely.

"But he was so funny!" she protested.

"It was a very painful position for a man of his rank," he continued, "and any one would have felt it."

"Well, you needn't make a personal matter of it," said Clip.

"Now I suppose I have vexed you by my plain speaking," he observed, ruefully. "Well, you must not expect me to turn an honest opinion into a compliment, for I can't do it."

"Who can?"

"Percival, of course."

"He is certainly more flattering than you are," said Clip. "But that is your misfortune, not your fault."

"I was all well enough before he came," said Courtenay. "It is true that I haven't the manners of a master of ceremonies, but—"

Miss Trevor interrupted him severely. "Neither has he. How absurd you are. Tell me, is this the way you talk to Spriggy?"

Mr. Courtenay Led Through a Labyrinth

"Miss Harcourt and I never have any differences," said Courtenay. "I couldn't quarrel with her in any case, for she reminds me somehow of my mother, with this difference, that she is young and happy."

"It would be strange if you didn't like her, considering that she is quite the dearest girl in the world," said Clip. "I was only wondering how she managed to find such joy in your society if you did nothing but make snippy remarks about her particular friends. But, then, she is better than I am, and has a lovely disposition, which I have not, so I suppose she makes allowances for you."

"Yes, she is better than you are. She is sincere," said Courtenay.

"And I am not, I suppose?"

"No, I don't think you are," he answered, severe in his turn. "It is a pity for any girl to have such a pretty face and such a fickle heart."

"What do you know about my heart? Whatever it may be, it can be of no possible interest to you," she said, with lowered lids. "Doesn't it seem rather unjust to say hateful things to me because Spriggy has gone to the village without you?"

"That has nothing whatever to do with it," said Courtenay. "You should know me well enough by this time to be sure of that."

"I think I liked you better when I didn't know you quite so well," said Clip.

"You liked me well enough until two weeks ago last Thursday precisely," said the young man.

"Why, what did you do then? I really don't remember. Let me see—that must have been the day

A Victim of Circumstances

we went to Mrs. Percival's," said Clip. "No, really, you didn't do anything that day. I remember that you were rather cross in the evening, but I'm sure we have been perfectly good friends since then."

"Oh, yes, when you have noticed me at all," said Courtenay.

"Don't be foolish," said Clip, swinging the little gate which led into Mr. Floyd's flower-garden, "and don't expect that an unusually attractive girl like Spriggy will ever be able to devote herself exclusively to one person, no matter how much she may like him. Other men like her as well as you do, and you must make up your mind to be sensible and take your turn with the rest. She won't like you any better for looking daggers at the other person. She never goes back on her friends, if that is any comfort to you. Besides, a fair man has no business to sulk. It isn't appropriate or becoming."

Courtenay viciously slammed the gate after him, and followed her into the garden without a word. Further conversation was impossible, for Mr. Floyd was just ahead of them, on his knees before a bed of pansies, busily weeding and grubbing. He scrambled to his feet, and greeted his visitors with effusion, enchanted at an opportunity of exhibiting his pet hobby to a fresh audience. He darted about, digging up roots, cutting slips, and making voluntary additions to Madam Trevor's original list. "It is a pleasure to see the general verdure after the rain," he said, while his trowel darted in and out of the black soil. He had quick, nervous, birdlike motions; McCloskey, who sat on a starch-box,

Mr. Courtenay Led Through a Labyrinth

stolidly grubbing weeds out of the walk, seemed lumbering and elephantine beside him. He wore gold-rimmed spectacles, which troubled him considerably by falling off into the flower-beds when he stooped, and the knees of his trousers were protected by carpet pads. "I fear that Bobby is still in his room. He cannot accustom himself to a half-past-seven breakfast. Mrs. Floyd, however, is on the veranda, and will be delighted to give you some raspberry shrub."

"Thank you. Grandmamma said I was to come back at once," said Clip. "We are coming to see Mrs. Floyd some time when we can stay longer."

"If you care to show Mr. Courtenay through the labyrinth, he will find it, if inferior in size to the one at Hampton Court, by no means badly laid out," said Mr. Floyd. "You young people will not miss me, I am sure, if I devote my immediate attention to these pansies, as I am a little anxious about them. In the conservatory you will find a night-blooming cereus, which, according to my calculation, should be in blossom on the evening of July fourth."

"You see, even the flowers celebrate the Fourth, Mr. Courtenay," said Clip. "Come and see the labyrinth. We will go out by the lower gate, Mr. Floyd, so good-bye, and thank you very much."

"Every one seems to take for granted that I've seen all the show places," said Courtenay, as they strolled through the Italian garden, with its formal rows of box-hedge, its fantastic shrubs and artificial cascades, and the painted statues, sadly

A Victim of Circumstances

dilapidated by the hostile climate, which Mr. Floyd had proposed to twine with garlands on the fête-days that no longer came. "As a matter of fact, I've seen nothing at all except a few natives, Fellaheen and such cattle, and the inside of a fever hospital."

"I have never been anywhere myself," said Clip. "Only Fort Laramie, and San Antonio, which I don't remember, New York, and here. If I were you I should want to travel. This is my home, and of course I like it, but it must fall very flat to you."

"I should be perfectly contented to spend the rest of my life here," said Courtenay. "You may travel from Dan to Beersheba and you can't find more than that—a home."

Miss Trevor felt vaguely sorry for him when he spoke thus, as people generally did, but she could not sympathize with the modesty of his ambitions, nor understand his craving for an anchorage. A wandering life appealed powerfully to this little domesticated bird, whose untried wings quivered for flight. "I am afraid I have not had enough experience to make me contented," she sighed.

"You don't understand how fortunate you are," he said. "You don't realize your opportunities."

"Neither do you," she laughed. "Here I am showing you one of the few curiosities of Fort-mounthouse, and you don't even look at it."

"Nothing but a tangle of evergreens and mosquitoes," said the young man.

"The fact is," Clip announced suddenly, with a

Mr. Courtenay Led Through a Labyrinth

tormenting gleam lurking under her lashes, "that if I were not very young and inexperienced I should never be so foolish as to give you the slightest encouragement, for you are not half good enough for my dear Spriggy."

"I should be good enough for you, though," said Courtenay.

"That is complimentary," said Miss Trevor, flitting ahead through the mazes of shrubbery. "I don't feel sure that I agree with you. But, then, it is a question, not of what is good enough for me, but of what is too good for you."

"Miss Trevor, you are driving me crazy," he broke out suddenly.

"What have I to do with it?" she asked.

He followed her in silence through the twisting paths until they reached the lower road. He held the gate open for her to pass through, and accompanied her, still silently, to her own door. Then he handed her the basket, and said, abruptly, "Good-morning."

"Aren't you coming in?" she asked in surprise.

"I thank you, no," he replied.

"Good-bye, then," she said, and ran up the steps.

CHAPTER XII

A FOOL'S ERRAND

IT was half past eight o'clock, and Mrs. Percival, Mr. Townshend, and Percy, having dined with the Floyds, were awaiting the arrival of the stage which was to carry the whole party to the Morgans' "cards and music."

Mrs. Floyd stood before the pier-glass, regretfully surveying her own reflection. "In Fortmounthouse we have only last year's styles," she said. "My skirt is made with a Spanish flounce, although everything now should be made with drapery. My bustle looks absurdly small beside yours, Louise, and yet I'm sure it ought to be large enough, for I put in three reeds and a pad this very morning with my own hands. I'm certain I look very dowdy and old-fashioned. My brown-striped satin would have been much more appropriate, but I can't wear it, being still in mourning for poor father."

"When a woman is past fifty black becomes her as well as anything," Mr. Floyd observed, not very happily.

"Indeed, Robert, I am but a few months past fifty," Mrs. Floyd protested. "I'm sure Louise is but a

A Fool's Errand

year younger, and nobody considers her an old woman. It is all owing to the difference in dress-makers. If I could afford to give Merovitch *carte blanche*, I should look as young as any one, in spite of all I've been through. Dear me, Louise, do you remember the first time we met Robert? We were dressed alike, in apple-green tarletans, the skirts trimmed with bows, and three pinked flounces of satin underneath. It was at your father's wedding, Percy. We were bridesmaids, and your uncle Robert was one of the groomsmen, and another was poor Richard Coke, who married Miss Mar out of pique when I refused him, and was afterwards killed in the war. Who could have predicted that thirty-one years from that time I should be living in Fortmounthouse, and going out of an evening without a proper gown to appear in?"

"But, my dearest Emmy, don't excite yourself," Mrs. Percival remonstrated. "Remember that you have an air and a carriage that distinguish anything you choose to wear."

"I don't choose to wear it," said Mrs. Floyd, plaintively. "I often say, when I see the shopkeepers' daughters in the village going about in silks and velvets, that my one consolation in life is remembering that I was born a Townshend."

Poor Mr. Floyd looked very guilty, feeling that the others would here bend reproachful eyes on him. It was apparent that his wife's lachrymal ducts were about to overflow, as they were wont to do on festal occasions, and he mentally cast about for a pretext for absenting himself from the room. Bobby, whose

A Victim of Circumstances

regularly paid allowance had something to do with the paucity of his mother's wardrobe, and who did not consider himself in the least culpable, anathematized the stage, and loudly wished that he had insisted on going with the Trevors.

Mrs. Percival, whose attire had so disturbed her sister's peace of mind, felt guilty at having put on so elaborate a gown, and Mr. Townshend inwardly cursed Emmeline's pride and folly, which forbade her acceptance of help from her family, while it was powerless to keep her from bewailing her hard fortunes. Percy, with a distressful countenance, hovered about her, proffering smelling-salts and fan with dutiful assiduity, while the unfortunate lady pursued: "And sleeves so much trimmed, while mine are plain! Madam Trevor, I know, will wear her black velvet, and all Fortmounthouse will certainly dress up to it. For an old lady one dress is sufficient, if it is a very elegant one, as hers certainly is, though, of course, a trifle out of style; but when I think of my point-lace flounces laid away, with nothing fit to put them on, it seems as though my cup was full."

"The Trevors are going in two loads, and the first has just passed," Bobby announced from the window. "Here comes the stage at last."

"Oh, dear! where is my opera-cloak?" cried his mother. "Look at my skirt, Louise. Doesn't it slink in behind? I cannot—no, I cannot—go out in a dress that falls plain in the back! Oh, why didn't I send for another reed? And yet the skirt is too scant to allow of more. It's of no use. I can't go."

A Fool's Errand

She sank into the nearest chair and wept into her yellow lace handkerchief. Her shoulders shook with sobs. Mrs. Percival dropped her wraps, and ran to console her, while Percy fanned her vigorously.

"My dear Aunt Emmeline, calm yourself!" he urged. "Don't give way to your feelings like this. It's of no consequence, I assure you."

"And you will be seated all the evening," said Mrs. Percival. "No one will notice whether it is plain or draped."

"My dear Emmy, the stage is at the door," said Mr. Floyd. "Might I beg you to check your emotions until we are in it?" Mr. Townshend administered a small glass of brandy to his sister, who revived sufficiently to be wrapped in her opera-cloak, and was led to the conveyance leaning on the arm of her nephew, while Bobby followed, sniffing disdainfully.

Madam Trevor was waiting in the dressing-room for the arrival of her granddaughters, clad in the imposing black velvet, and with a huge diamond ornament scintillating on her ample breast. Seated in state, she scrutinized the smallest detail of the company which passed in review before her, and no one would have suspected the preoccupation to which she was a prey. The general had that week written to announce his intention of coming to visit her the first of September, and had spoken of taking his daughter back with him. The magnate's sentiments regarding her son and his career were discreetly veiled from the world and her own family;

A Victim of Circumstances

she proposed, if possible, to keep the guidance of his children in her own hands, and the impending struggle weighed upon her spirits. She had allowed Clip to be present this evening solely as a favor to Trevor, who had begged her to suspend regulations for once. The young person arrived, demure in white muslin, pleasurably excited, with dilated pupils hidden under her discreetly lowered lashes, and followed her grandmother and Spriggy into the hall, where Roy was waiting for them. The music, the efflorescence of local talent, was in full swing. The rector was performing a feeble solo upon the flute as Madam Trevor entered, which he broke off to greet her. The two girls soon had their own little court, as assiduous as their grandmother's. As each accomplished damsel took her place at the piano a little group of interested relatives fanned and gasped and looked anxious. It was quite like a boarding-school commencement, and Miss Trevor, surveying the red and exhausted performers, was thankful that her own lack of proficiency was such that she could not be called upon for a solo.

Everybody who was expected had arrived, and consequently, when a belated carriage drove up to the door, there was a general stir of curiosity to know who this tardy guest might be. For Spriggy it must be confessed that the evening had so far fallen a little flat, and now she looked eagerly into the hall, then with a sudden sense of shame devoted her attention to Percy Townshend, who was once more in attendance upon his uncle. It was so warm that Madam Trevor had required her grandson's

A Fool's Errand

arm for a little stroll in the grounds, for the velvet gown was oppressive, and her heart was heavy. To his attentive ear she imparted the news of the general's intentions. "I cannot consider it wise," she said. "The child is too young and too pretty to run wild at an army post. She will marry, and I don't wish her to marry in the army. Her education isn't completed, and she is a little goose, with no idea of taking care of herself. I intended to bring her out in due season, and marry her properly. No man can attend suitably to those matters."

"Why do you let him take her?" Trevor inquired. "It is only a whim on his part, and he would soon tire of the responsibility. Why don't you flatly refuse to let her go at present?"

"He is her father. He has his legal rights," said the magnate. They were passing the parlor windows as she spoke, and they saw Percival enter the room with his hostess, and after a brief parley make directly for where Clip held her little court.

At that instant a vague discomfort stirred in Trevor's heart as he said to his grandmother: "You wouldn't have any difficulty about marrying her at this moment. If it were all settled before he came—"

"She is only seventeen," said the old lady. "Of course, I was married at her age, but it makes a very long life."

When they repassed the window, Clip had risen and was taking Percival's arm. A moment later they reappeared on the piazza. He was bending over her in a most devoted manner. It was his way

A Victim of Circumstances

with women ; still, "Why can't he leave her alone? —a child like that," Trevor's heart protested, with an odd little pang of something more akin to jealousy than he had felt for years. She was not such a child after all, it appeared, or a man as difficult to please and as hopelessly undomesticated as Percival would hardly take the trouble to come from Newport on the chance of seeing her. "Of course, Spriggy is the real attraction," he reassured himself, but the conviction was growing upon him that the successful aspirant for his little cousin's hand would be wise not to risk too long a wooing. "It seems a pity to let so much beauty go out of the family," he said, aloud. The idea shot through his mind that it would be pleasant to subdue her fine disdain, and to change those little airs and graces into responsive tenderness—pleasant if the task were his, horrible to contemplate if it should fall to any other man. He was relieved when Clip, seeing her grandmother, came down the steps dutifully to inquire if she were faint, or desired anything from the house. Percival escorted the old lady back to the card-tables, and devoted himself to Spriggy forthwith, leaving Trevor to stroll up and down with Clip; but later in the evening he claimed her again, and carried her boldly away under Madam Trevor's eyes to a secluded corner of the piazza.

"So you think I'm insincere?" he said, taking up the conversation at the point where it had been left off.

"How can I help it when you tell me such things?" she asked.

A Fool's Errand

"What things?"

"That you came here to-night expressly to see me."

"But why shouldn't you believe it?"

"I should be very conceited and silly—a man like you. Ever so many people have told me that I mustn't believe such things, even if men do tell me so. They are only pretty speeches, and not to be taken seriously."

"But as it happens, I have been perfectly honest with you," said Percival. "Don't tell me that you don't want me to mean it."

She looked up at him timidly. He was certainly not joking; indeed, there was a seriousness in his face and voice that frightened her. She had had her day-dreams, her flights of ambition, and the longing for power which every woman probably experiences; but now that one of her visions had come true, she shrank from it in alarm. She hated men—she hated to have people look at her so—she wished herself at home with Jim. There was an absolute terror in her eyes as she raised them to him, in an unconscious appeal to spare her any further startling revelations.

"If it is too soon, I can wait, Clip," he said, quietly. She had never seen him in earnest before. It was terrible to have him looking down at her with such a serious, tender face.

"Oh, don't! Don't!" she said, with a little gasp. "Please don't say anything more, but just take me back." She would not even take his arm, but slipped into a seat behind her grandmother's chair.

A Victim of Circumstances

He felt horribly guilty at having frightened her so. His evening was a disappointment and a failure, and he had made a fool of himself. After all, how could he know that in a year's time he would care more for this girl than for another? He was sorry that he had come.

If Percival tried to convince himself that he did not know his own mind, there was another gentleman in the same condition, to whom his second trip to the piazza proved a final revelation. "Grandmother," he said, as they drove home through the starless night, "give her to me. I will take good care of her." He held the old lady's hand as he pleaded his cause. In truth, she made no opposition, for nothing could have pleased her better. He himself was triumphant at learning for the first time that he loved Clip and that he was going to marry her.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LESSER EVIL

“WELL,” said Madam Trevor the next morning, as the last of her charges straggled down to breakfast half an hour after the appointed time, “I am thankful that parties in Fortmount-house are few and far between, if this is the kind of work they make. The whole business of the house is delayed, Marjorie has black circles around her eyes, and Rose looks as though she had been crying.”

“Yet we were not up so late,” said Spriggy, sugaring her oatmeal with a lavish hand.

“And I suppose that before you are thoroughly awake Sidney Percival and young Townshend and Bobby and Mr. Courtenay will come trooping over to raise the roof off the house.”

“Sidney won’t come, for he left in the early train,” said Trevor.

“It is fairly pitiable to see a young man of his age so restless and unsettled,” Madam Trevor announced. “I always imagine that such people cannot have easy consciences.”

She herself was more than usually full of business that morning, as Clip presently found to her cost,

A Victim of Circumstances

being summoned to her grandmother's own room to an interview, from which she emerged with wet eyes and flaming cheeks. Trevor was seated in the hall, placidly perusing the morning paper. He threw it down when he saw her, and awaited her standing, and when she turned from red to white at sight of him, and seemed about to run away, he followed her across the hall to the bow-window which looked out over the garden. Here she flung herself down upon the cushioned seat, and looked at him accusingly. He seated himself beside her and tried to take her hand, but she snatched it indignantly away from him.

"I thought I knew what was going on," he said, "so I waited for you. I didn't want grandmother to tell you. I wanted to speak for myself."

Two large tears rolled down Miss Trevor's cheeks. "It appears that I am to have nothing whatever to say about it," she observed.

"Surely she didn't tell you that you had no choice in the matter?" he asked.

"I don't know what she told me. I'm the most wretched girl on earth," she declared.

"One would think that we were all doing you a deadly injury," he said, laughing. "On the contrary, I am paying you the greatest compliment that a man can offer to a woman. I never thought seriously of marrying until I saw you."

"As that was fully seventeen years ago—" she began, tearfully.

"That doesn't count," said Trevor. "Say a month ago. That is nearer the truth. Come, now,

The Lesser Evil

don't cry. I'm not an ogre, am I? And if you will have me—"

"It is just a choice between you and papa," said Clip, with a fresh burst of tears, "and I think I know you best. I don't want to go away. I can't leave Jim and Spriggy, and grandmamma says I should certainly come to grief without her. I don't think *that* at all, but I can't go so far from everybody I care for."

"Then you will take me?" said her cousin.

"I suppose I can try it," said Clip. "But I have just detested you all along, and I don't see how I am to turn right around and like you."

"I will show you," said Trevor, obligingly. "I believe I can make you care for me a little in time. By-the-way, what sort of a ring would you like? Do you want the regulation solitaire, or have you a fancy for something else?"

Her mouth, which had been drooping dolefully, now curved into a little involuntary smile. "I would rather have a solitaire," she said. "I haven't a ring in the world."

"Let me see how large it will have to be," said Trevor, and he took her hand once more. This time she did not resist, and he raised it to his lips. "I don't thank grandmother for forestalling me," he said. "I wanted to tell you myself."

"I am very glad you hadn't the opportunity," said Clip. "Please don't do that. I don't like it. Nobody ever did such a thing before except that horrid Bobby, and I went up-stairs and scrubbed it with soap and water."

A Victim of Circumstances

"Which hand?" Trevor inquired.

"I don't remember. It was ages ago, and so much has happened since then," she said, with a sigh of experience.

He took her other hand and laid it against his cheek. "He sha'n't do it any more," he said.

"If grandmamma were to see you she would say that you were very silly," said Clip, severely.

"But I'm not," said Trevor. "On the contrary, I'm behaving better than most men would under the circumstances."

"Perhaps now I shall be allowed to have a new hat, and high heels on my slippers," his fiancée hazarded, with chilling practicability.

"You shall have anything you like," said Trevor, rashly.

"Jim will be simply disgusted with me," she announced, suddenly, in tones of dismay.

"Oh, I think we can propitiate him," said Trevor.

"I don't believe you are one bit in earnest," she exclaimed, half indignant and half relieved, seeing his gray eyes full of amusement. She thought of Percival's face the night before, and did not know whether to be glad or sorry that her cousin showed no intention of alarming her in the same way.

He laughed outright. "My dear little girl, what do you expect? I fear that swords and pistols are not in my line. It is true that I'm very much afraid of frightening you, but, as for being in earnest, I most certainly am."

Miss Trevor became morally reflective. "What surprising things do happen in this world! Who

The Lesser Evil

would have thought yesterday that you would want to marry me to-day? I shall never dare make any plans again."

"Oh, you are all settled now," said Trevor. "There is no room left for conjecture. You will become reasonably fond of me, and wear your ring, when you get it, like a good girl, and fret yourself thin over your trousseau."

"Suppose papa still insists on taking me back with him?" she suggested.

"In that case, I shall have to run away with you." He put his arm around her as he spoke, and drew her close to him. "You might consider me 'in earnest' then. Don't look so distressed, dolly. I've been very good not to do it before, and I can't wait forever. If you knew how fond I am of you, you wouldn't think me a brute for wanting to kiss you once or twice."

She looked resigned and helpless. "I knew I shouldn't like it," she said, mournfully.

"But you will after a while," he assured her.

"Come on," she said, springing to her feet. "I can't wait a minute longer."

"For what, little girl?"

"Why, to tell Spriggy, of course."

"Oh, don't leave me like this."

"You may come, too, if you like," said Clip, graciously. "I'm a little ashamed to tell her all by myself."

Spriggy was putting her desk in order—an un-failing sign that things were not at their best with her. It was Trevor who, with complacency, im-

A Victim of Circumstances

parted the news to her, and failed to notice the relief which involuntarily spread over her face. She had expected some such news ever since last night, and had nerved herself to receive it with a fitting cordiality, but it was not Trevor whom she had dreaded to see standing beside her little cousin. Her hopes gained a brief reprieve—those hopes which she scorned to admit even to herself. She embraced Clip with fervor and compassion, and be it spoken to her credit that her sympathies and good wishes would have been just as sincere had Percival stood in Trevor's place.

CHAPTER XIV

SUSPENSE

“**N**OTHING is to be announced at present,” said Madam Trevor, with decision. “Three days ago, Roy, I advised you to write at once to the general, and, until I have seen the letter written and posted and you have received his answer, I cannot possibly consider it a formal engagement.”

“Well, here goes, then,” said Trevor, and seated himself at his grandmother’s desk. “It will be short and sweet. What would you say, Clip? I can’t think of anything but ‘Dear Uncle Edward.’”

“Neither can I,” said Clip, looking over his shoulder.

“Marjorie, you may go on with your mending,” her grandmother observed. “Certainly there will be no letter written if you take a hand in the business.”

“You might dictate it, grandmother,” said Trevor. “We want to finish it and go out sailing.”

“Not alone,” the magnate announced.

“For the love of Heaven, then, let us get this thing over and know where we stand,” said Trevor, fervently, and he actually wrote the fateful letter without more ado.

A Victim of Circumstances

"I wonder," said Clip, as they sat in the bow of the *Daisy B.* on their way up the river, "whether Mr. Courtenay is a fortune-hunter?"

"His father is," said Trevor, "but I don't believe it of Courtenay himself. He is too absurdly innocent, for one thing. What are you thinking of now?"

"Spriggy seems to like him so much," said Clip. "Sometimes I wish she didn't."

"She might do worse, you know," said Trevor. "She has enough for two, and, anyhow, money isn't everything. Of course, I should prefer Sidney to any one I know, but I begin to believe that he's not a marrying man."

Clip discreetly refrained from comment on this last remark, and answered, "It must be a horrible thing to be married for your money. I'm almost glad that I shall have nothing worth mentioning, so that I may be saved that humiliation."

"Little goose!" said Trevor.

"I ought to tell you," she confessed, after an uneasy silence, "that if you had been a poor man, I don't think I—I mean, I might have gone to papa."

"You shouldn't tell me so," said Trevor. "It is too great a blow to my vanity. Promise me that you won't go about proclaiming your mercenary motives." He laughed as he spoke. Nothing seemed to disturb his serenity, and she found this rather irritating.

"I won't," said Clip, obligingly. "But about Mr. Courtenay—don't you think that he has a very bad temper? He sulks so."

"If that letter comes," said Trevor, comfortably,

Suspense

"anybody may marry anybody else with my blessing."

"I do think you are rather aggravating," said Clip.

The person under discussion was at the helm, and his attention should have been given unreservedly to keeping the sloop's head before the wind, but he cast suspicious and wistful glances not only at Spriggy and Mr. Floyd, who were acting as able-bodied seamen, but at the idle passengers in the bow. Percy Townshend, who knew nothing about boats, was conscientiously blistering his hands in the pursuit of useful knowledge under Spriggy's tuition. His face was scarlet, his collar was wilted, his decorous garb was covered with tar and sand from the dirty cockpit, but he labored cheerfully, under the impression that he was enjoying his vacation. Courtenay regarded even the new-comer severely. He was in the unpleasant predicament of being seriously smitten with two young women at once—a curious, but by no means infrequent, phenomenon. He wanted to talk to them both all the time, and his desire for monopoly made him morose and gloomy on such frequent occasions as its gratification was impossible. This trait, in a naturally amiable person, was particularly lamentable and disconcerting, as it had the effect of placing everybody else in the wrong. Now he glowered at the company until Spriggy brought him some beer and sandwiches, and Roy went to sleep in the cabin, when he speedily regained his spirits and beamed upon the party.

It was during the scramble up the cliff that the sun

A Victim of Circumstances

went into eclipse once more, and his worst suspicions were confirmed. Roy and Clip lagged behind. He wanted to wait for them, but Spriggy hurried him up the path. He went back after a missing coat, and passed the stragglers. Trevor was carrying nothing, as usual, which may have been accountable for the fact that he was certainly holding Clip's hand. It is true that she promptly drew it away, and held up her dress with more anxiety for her ruffles than for a continuance of sentiment, but this afforded little solace to Courtenay, who, sore in spirit, hastened back to the consoling ministrations of Spriggy.

"When grandmother makes me a present of this place," said Trevor, "I shall have a flight of steps built down to the beach. This is too much like work."

"Have an elevator," Bobby suggested.

"That would ruin the appearance of the water front," said Percy, seriously.

Mr. Floyd fell back to the rear of the procession. "What an unsurpassed ass poor Percy is!" he groaned to Trevor. "One of the few pleasures of my blameless youth was beating him, and I wish now that I had done it more thoroughly."

"He looks like those steel engravings in grandmamma's old 'Keepsakes'—'Portrait of a Gentleman.' If he only had a stock, and a curl on top of his head, one would feel quite safe in addressing him as 'Esteemed Sir,'" said Clip. "But you needn't tell him so, Bobby, for he is really very nice, and I wouldn't make fun of him for the world. But does he know how to do *anything*? Can he dance?"

Suspense

"Only one step," said Mr. Floyd, "and that is attendance on Uncle Maturin."

"I do wish some one would give a ball," Miss Trevor sighed.

"Your grandmother wouldn't let you go, so what is the use of crying for the moon?" Mr. Floyd demanded. "If they had all the saints in the Church calendar for patronesses, she would feel that she conferred a favor on 'em by allowing you to be present. When she goes sailing into heaven she will manage to make Saint Peter feel that he's just a common door-keeper after all."

"Aren't you ashamed to be so irreverent?" Miss Trevor asked, sternly.

"I am never ashamed," he replied, airily, "not even when I ought to be. Just look at Courtenay, if you want a treat. I have never seen such a sulky devil."

"I suppose he can't help his disposition, poor thing," said Clip, who felt it her duty to disagree with him.

"Coronets are more than kind hearts," he paraphrased, "and already methinks I see the shadow of a diadem upon that cloudy brow. If I had a title, how I should speed in my wooing."

"Whoever she may be, I think your native cheek will serve you quite as well," said Trevor, kindly.

"No; all girls love a lord. Be he never so humble, there's nothing like a viscount," Mr. Floyd warbled, too loud for politeness. "Even you two—"

Clip suddenly took on much of the majesty of her grandmother. "When a Trevor marries for

A Victim of Circumstances

position—" she said, dismissing the suggestion with lifted eyebrows. Roy was much amused at the reproduction of type, and Mr. Floyd frisked forward to annoy the van.

Notwithstanding her scorn and incredulity, and her conviction that no one on earth was quite good enough for Spriggy, Miss Trevor was suffering considerable uneasiness regarding Courtenay's pretensions, and her cousin's acceptance of them. Devotion was essential to Spriggy's well-being, and since she could not honestly profess herself contented with the secondary place which Percival too plainly accorded her, she found Courtenay's homage doubly soothing and acceptable. She was a young person of singularly direct action and considerable probity in her dealings with herself, and for a woful night and day she had realized that Percival had treated her as a confidante, and not as the mainspring of those new resolutions the avowal of which had afforded her so keen a satisfaction. He had appealed more strongly to her imagination than any man she had ever known. Even her childish recollections presented him always in the light of a hero. She could not sway him, she did not understand him, he was invested with the charm of the unattainable, and whatever possibilities of love and devotion the mystery cloaked from her were unmistakably laid at her little cousin's feet. She would not mope, and she bravely overcame a few natural twinges of jealousy. Her only course was to get over her fancy as soon as possible, and take the goods the gods provided—

Suspense

so she was kind to Courtenay, whom she liked, and patient with Percy, who bored her. As for Mr. Floyd, candor compels the confession that she had never for a moment considered him with the slightest degree of seriousness.

The general's letter did not arrive until the morning of the Fourth, when Madam Trevor, bearing the morning's mail, sought out the two people most concerned, who were unpacking fireworks in the carriage-house, and imparted its contents to them. "My dear nephew," it ran, "I am in receipt of your note of the 22d, which, I confess, has occasioned me much surprise and distress. Prior to this communication, such a possibility as you suggest has never crossed my mind. I have always regarded my daughter as a mere child, and I had pictured her as soothing my declining years, when my country should no longer require those services which have deprived me of the society of my family. It is difficult for me even now to realize the changes which must have taken place during my absence. I am deeply grieved that my necessary exile from home should have caused my child to feel that lack of confidence in my interest and affection which is indicated by her failure to consult me in a matter so nearly concerning her future welfare. However, since it appears that I am hereafter to be debarred from the counsels of my family, and since my mother has already given her consent to an arrangement consummated without my knowledge, far be it from me to withhold that blessing which is too plainly asked of me merely as a matter of

A Victim of Circumstances

form. Accept the best wishes of a lonely and disappointed man, and believe me as ever, your affectionate uncle.—EDWARD TREVOR."

"Cordial, isn't it?" said the recipient of this tender sheet. "However, since we have the consent, we needn't worry about the spirit in which it is given."

"While I have charge of the general's children I shall endeavor to do for them as I judge best," said the magnate with dignity. "I consider the engagement suitable in every way, the general countenances it, and I shall announce it on Monday. Here is a package, Roy, which has just come for you by express. As it was small, I thought you would be more likely to receive it safely if I brought it to you myself. The household is demoralized this morning, and I am very thankful that the Fourth of July comes but once a year."

When she had sailed away to order the ubiquitous Bobby out of the hammock, Trevor opened the package, and gave Clip a little velvet box. "Your ring has come," he said. "I thought I might as well take the risk of having the date engraved inside. I hope it's all right. Grandmother appears to be running the whole thing, and I didn't care about having her superintend this, so I stole a march on her."

"It is lovely," said Clip, "and, oh, what a big one!"

"Come here and let me put it on. It fits pretty well, doesn't it? A little large, perhaps, but we will get a guard to keep it on," he said, and bent his head to kiss her hand. "Don't take it off again."

Suspense

It makes me feel sure of you. Tell me, like a good girl, that you are not sorry."

Clip looked at the new ring sparkling on her finger, and in its contemplation suppressed a little sigh. "I'm not going to be sorry," she said, bravely, then instinctively put her left hand behind her as Mr. Floyd came rushing through the stable.

"She won't let me swing," he announced, belligerently, "and she won't let me lie flat. I told her that I was staying to make myself useful, and she just sniffed at me. Gosh! what a mess you've made here! Anybody but you would get particular fits."

"You can finish unpacking this box, if you are dying for something to do," said Trevor.

Mr. Floyd did not respond. He was dodging and peering to obtain a glimpse of Clip's hand, which she still kept hidden, but from which came suspicious gleams and flashes. Finally, with an offensive grin, he raised the fourth finger of his left hand to his mouth, and drawled out with a nasal twang, "'Have you seen my pa's cow?'"

"Bobby! How can you be so vulgar?" cried Clip, indignantly.

"Well, I see what I see," said Mr. Floyd, apologetically. "Give us your paw, and let's have a look at it. Lord! You needn't blush about it. I've suspected it all along. I say, Roy, may I kiss the bride?"

"If you show yourself worthy of the honor," said Trevor, "and if the bride is willing."

"If you mean me, I shall most decidedly not be willing," said Clip, emphatically.

A Victim of Circumstances

"Bless you, my children. I shall take great pleasure in spreading the joyful news abroad," cried Bobby.

"The fiat has gone forth that it is not to be announced until Monday," said Trevor.

"Well, well, well," said Bobby, shaking his head. "Now the first break is made, I suppose we shall all be going off like hot cakes. Mark my words, old Sid will be the next, and then Percy, and then me."

"Who would have you?" Clip asked, scornfully.

"Plenty of people," said Mr. Floyd, complacently. "Now, Clip, if you hadn't been in such a hurry, you might have tried your luck at Uncle Maturin. Just think what an opportunity for an enterprising young woman. Sixty-three, a bachelor, gouty, dyspeptic, weak heart, and worth a cool five million. Since you're out of the running, I think I will recommend him to Spriggy."

"How silly you are!" said Clip.

"Oh, of course," said Bobby, adopting a languishing air, "he isn't Roy."

"Run along, won't you?" said Trevor; and, strange to say, Mr. Floyd complied.

"It will be all over the place by night," said Clip, sadly.

"What difference does it make, except to grandmother?" he asked. "A day more or less can be of no consequence. I hope you don't mind, dolly?"

"It will be over all the sooner," she answered.

Suspense

"At all events, I shall not have to go back with papa."

"You dreaded that, didn't you?" he asked.

"Yes. It may seem very shocking to you," she confessed, "but I can't help being afraid of him."

"Isn't he good to you?"

"I know him so little," she prevaricated. "Well, I am afraid Bobby is right, only I believe that Spriggy will be the next to go."

"Even so, he might be right, don't you think so?" said Trevor. "There is nobody who would please me better."

"But I'm so afraid of Mr. Courtenay."

"It does begin to look a little that way," he agreed. "The old man certainly can't accuse me of not doing my duty by his son."

"How I shall hate being her bridesmaid," said Clip.

"You won't have the chance in any case," he assured her, "because we are going to be married early in the fall—the last of September, for instance."

"Oh, no!" said Clip, in dismay.

"October, then, before the general goes back."

"Please don't. I'm not ready to talk about it yet."

"He may want you to go back with him anyhow," Trevor suggested, unkindly.

"Don't let me go," said Clip. "I think I would almost rather marry you at once than that—but you know, Roy, that I don't love you enough."

"That will be all right," he assured her. "You like me better than you think."

"If I had any spirit at all, I suppose I should fight

A Victim of Circumstances

everybody—you and grandmamma and papa," said Clip; "but I'm afraid I am just a poor weak creature who hates trouble, and is afraid of being deadly homesick and unhappy."

"I think you are a very sensible little girl, and you won't regret it," said Trevor with conviction.

CHAPTER XV

MR. FLOYD ASSUMES THE PART OF HERALD

"I TRUST you have set the mines as far from the house as possible," Miss Harcourt observed, as Bobby, Courtenay, and Jim set off towards the cliffs after dinner. Mr. and Mrs. Floyd had already arrived, and the rattling of silver chains announced the approach of Mrs. Percival's victoria—a vehicle which never failed to excite her less-fortunate sister's sense of injury and grief. It was growing dark, and the clouds looked threatening. "I wouldn't for the world blow off old Mr. Townshend's estimable nose," Spriggy protested, as a parting caution.

"It isn't an estimable nose at all," Bobby declared. "It's a cantankerous, cussed old organ, and belongs to the most contrary old crank it has ever been my misfortune to meet with."

"What is the matter now?" Trevor asked, glancing towards the *porte-cochère*, where the old gentleman was alighting, bland and charming, a welcome addition to the party of older people on the piazza.

"Percy spoils him," Mr. Floyd grumbled. "Why, he won't stand the least thing from me any more, and he used to take twice as much from me as he would from anybody else. I vow, I wish Sidney

A Victim of Circumstances

would come and take a turn at him. He has a way of skinning you alive that's anything but agreeable. Polite is no word for it, but I'd rather he'd swear at me and be done with it. I do hate sarcasm, but if ever a man needed hoisting with his own petard it is Uncle Maturin, and Sidney is the only person to lay him out cold without saying a thing that he can take exception to."

"Patriotism is no doubt an excellent thing," Madam Trevor was saying, "but I confess that I breathe more freely when the Fourth is passed, and I realize that I have a roof over my head for a year to come. Roy, if you are going down to the bluff, I wish you to tell them not to turn the rockets towards the house. There! Where did that stick go to? Impress it upon them all that if they are not more careful they shall have no rockets another year."

"The stick went into the river," said Trevor, without moving.

"Did you see it? I wonder that it didn't fall on their foolish heads," said Madam Trevor. "James is wearing his new Norfolk jacket, and he will certainly riddle it with holes from those flying sparks!" She shook her head warningly at the group on the bluff and returned to her guests.

Mr. Floyd, Senior, was lamenting Bobby's distaste for gardening, and describing the peace which he found in that congenial pursuit. "Although I'm not so extremely fond of green things myself," his wife said, plaintively, "and I should like to go to the theatre occasionally."

Mr. Floyd Assumes the Part of Herald

"Why don't you wander in the labyrinth?" Mr. Townshend asked.

"It is so hot and sandy there," said the literal Mrs. Floyd, "and I can never remember which turning I ought to take, so I am sure to get confused, and have to call either Mr. Floyd or McCloskey, and neither of them is ever on hand; or, if he is there, McCloskey is sure to be intoxicated, which isn't a good condition in which to find one's way about in a labyrinth. One day I was there for three hours, and my face was so swollen with mosquito bites that Mr. Floyd insisted it must be poison-ivy. No, if I must stay out of doors, I prefer the Italian garden, where at least there are statues of people."

A loud howl from the cliff here caused every one to start, and Madam Trevor promptly supposed that some one was killed, and sent Percy Townshend down to investigate. Presently Bobby came rushing up to the house shaking his fingers, and was taken to the dining-room by Clip to have a poultice applied to the injured members. Courtenay took his place, and the last exhibit of rockets and Roman candles went off in a blaze of glory and Bengal lights, after which the party repaired to the house for dancing and supper. Spriggy seated herself at the piano to play a waltz, and Bobby had already secured Miss Morgan as a partner. Courtenay stood by the door, not caring to dance with any one but Spriggy. As Clip passed him she noticed that he held his right wrist rather stiffly. "I believe you have burned yourself," she said. "Come

A Victim of Circumstances

into the dining-room and let me fix it as I did Bobby's."

"It's of no consequence," he answered, brusquely.

"You won't think so to-morrow, when it is horribly painful," she said. "Come along. It is no trouble at all, and we always have the flaxseed ready for accidents."

He followed her to the dining-room, where she proceeded to spread a poultice for him. His wrist was certainly smarting fiercely. "What a dreadful burn!" she said, sympathetically. "I am so sorry that our fireworks were to blame for it. I ought to have some bandages to keep this from slipping. Would you mind if I used my handkerchief? Yours is too badly scorched." She had wound one of her little squares of cambric around her hand to hide her new ring, but she took it off, and twisted it around his wrist. As she did so he noticed the new ornament, and jerked his hand away from her almost before she had completed her ministrations.

"I see you are to be congratulated," he said, savagely.

"Oh, I forgot it," said Clip, in confusion. "Grand-mamma has decided not to announce it until Monday."

"I should think everybody might know it," he remarked. "I have suspected it for a week."

"Aren't you going to say something nice to me?" she asked. "You see, you are almost the first person outside the family to know it, and I think you might be a little more—sympathetic."

"You don't like me any more, Miss Trevor. You

Mr. Floyd Assumes the Part of Herald

are determined to keep me 'outside the family.' You can't help being my cousin now in one way, if not in another."

"You don't seem pleased at the prospect," said Clip.

"I can't explain. I suppose you are very happy," said Courtenay, with a sort of a gulp, "and I don't see why you should object so much to my being happy in the same way."

"You think I am prejudiced against you, don't you? It isn't so much that," said Clip, "as it is the feeling you always have when you love any one very much—the feeling that nobody in the world is half worthy of her. No doubt Roy's friends will feel that way about me, when they know the truth. I don't want to be bad friends with you, and, after all, what could I do to help or hinder you?"

"You have more influence over her than any one I know," he said. "You are inseparable. If she sees that you don't like me, she will like me less."

"I want to ask you one question," said Clip. "How much do you love her? Do you feel certain that you care for her in every possible way, and that you will go on caring for her, no matter what happens, all your life? Can you imagine yourself growing tired of what she is, and wishing she were something she is not? If I were sure that you loved her better than you do yourself, as she deserves to be loved, I should have no right to be unhappy about it, but, until I know, you mustn't ask me to help you."

"I have told you how I feel about her. I can't

A Victim of Circumstances

make speeches," said Courtenay. "I may as well own to you that I've tried my luck, and got no definite answer. She only promised me that she wouldn't accept any one else for two months." He suddenly turned very red, and after a moment's hesitation blurted out, "Is that the way you love Roy?"

Now Miss Trevor had been taught to tell the truth and shame the devil, and yet, since Roy's request was fresh in her mind, she disliked to openly avow her indifference to him. Indeed, at the moment, she was not quite sure of it herself. So she responded loftily, "Of course it is," and left him to his own devices, with a growing conviction that she had furnished him with an excuse for his inquisitiveness.

The older people were playing whist, when Bobby hit upon a bold and sensational device for enlivening the evening. Approaching the table, he said, with a barefaced imitation of the rector's most genial manner: "So, Mrs. Trevor, I hear that you are soon to lose one of your granddaughters. Well, well! Who would have thought it? It seems but yesterday that she was making mud pies, and now she is going to be married. It makes me feel old, indeed it does, dear lady."

The innocent Mr. Berry, aghast, but ignorant of a caricature only too patent to every one else, shared the general consternation which this recklessness created. Mrs. Floyd, aware from a distant table that her son had been guilty of some indiscretion, revoked, and felt for her handkerchief. Mr. Townshend, though unable to forego a furtive chuckle at

Mr. Floyd Assumes the Part of Herald

the perfect imitation of an excellent person who bored him, pursed up his lips ominously, and Madam Trevor's very cap bristled with indignation. She made no direct reply to his observation, and continued with her game, merely observing, "You will find the young people in the other room," in a tone which admitted of no two interpretations, and he departed. When the game was over, and supper was brought in, and not before, did the astute veteran gracefully play the card which had been forced from her hand, and announce to her old friends the first betrothal among her grandchildren. Mrs. Floyd shed tears of sentiment, and when Clip appeared, very pink and a little embarrassed, Madam Trevor vouchsafed no sign of surprise at the very gorgeous new ring which glittered on her little hand.

In consequence of the unpleasantness attendant upon his indiscretion, Bobby accepted an invitation to spend a fortnight in Newport, and, as Courtenay's father had been urging the advisability of travel, the young man very reluctantly decided to accompany him, and to remain for a week or so under his wing. They arrived late in the afternoon, and went directly to the cottage which Percival with several bachelor friends had rented for the season. "I'm due at Mamma Fielding's," the lively gentleman explained, "and she'll be cursing me if I don't turn up within an hour of my trunk, but I just stopped in to see what sort of a place you had here. I know she will be dying to hear about it, and I've promised the girls to let them know. Pretty well fixed, aren't you? I wouldn't mind staying here myself."

A Victim of Circumstances

Percival was going out to dine. The other three inmates of the house had not appeared. "It is more comfortable than a hotel," he said. "We like each other and our cook, so we are happy. You might dine with us to-morrow at seven, if you have nothing more amusing on hand, and go on to the Casino dance afterward."

Mr. Floyd was partaking of a brandy-and-soda, and eyed the well-furnished sideboard with favor. "Who tends bar?" he asked.

"Lockjaw Jones, as a rule," said Percival.

"If that's the case, I'll come early and often," Mr. Floyd announced. "A bucolic existence is all very well, but I couldn't have stood it much longer, even if I hadn't been driven out of Eden."

"What have you done now?" his cousin inquired.

"Nothing much," said the marplot. "Nothing, that is, to make a fuss about. I merely spoke of Clip's engagement to Madam Trevor before she was quite ready to announce it, so that it came out three days sooner than she intended. I'm sure, Clip was wearing her ring, and if that wasn't a dead give-away, please tell me what is. Roy didn't care, so for a wonder I have some friends left, but I thought I had better make my absence felt for a while."

"This is news to me," said Percival. "You say Miss Trevor is engaged?"

"Hasn't Roy written to you? The lazy beggar!" cried Mr. Floyd, indignantly. "Isn't that just like him? I suppose he will make her do it for him. He is too busy spooning to care about doing the decent

Mr. Floyd Assumes the Part of Herald

thing by his friends. The old lady is as pleased as Punch, and everybody is in high favor but me. It was the most sudden thing I ever saw—eh, Courtenay? I must say I never was more astonished in my life. My private opinion is that he hated to let so much beauty go out of the family, and he knew he'd have to hustle to make sure of it. Think of old Roy getting married. Funny, isn't it? Well, I must toddle. See you to-morrow, old man."

Percival went to the glass to readjust his tie, and was a little startled at the reflection of his own face. "I didn't know it would hit so hard," he said to himself, impatiently. There was no doubt left in his mind, now that it was too late.

CHAPTER XVI

WE VISIT A FASHIONABLE WATERING-PLACE

ON the following evening Courtenay met the other members of the house-keeping quartet—Tom Lawrence, Ned Livingston, and a certain solemn-looking Delavan Jones, commonly known as "Lock-jaw," an artist by profession, and a Bohemian from predilection. These gentlemen made themselves so very agreeable that the young man, who had come under protest and predisposed to detest both the place and the people, found himself slipping into a thorough enjoyment of his surroundings and a keen relish for their society. After dinner Bobby came in with Walter Fielding, and the company sat down to the beguiling, and at that time novel, game of hearts.

"All the same, I'm due at the Casino at half past ten," said Lawrence, "and I tell you now that I stop in an hour, game or no game."

"Girl?" asked Mr. Floyd.

"Uncle," said Lawrence, promptly.

"Come, now, Percy is the only one who does that sort of thing," Mr. Floyd protested, finding himself an object of ridicule. "He trots around after the old man with a spoonful of peppermint and a shawl to keep off the draughts."

We Visit a Fashionable Watering-Place

"Bless the parson. He's not a bad old thing," said Mr. Jones. "I bet you five to three he leads you both."

"Don't throw away your shekels, my son," said Mr. Floyd.

"Come on and play. Bobby, you talk too much. Peace spreads her pinions at your approach," said Livingston.

"Takes to her heels, you mean," said Mr. Jones. "There's a king for you, Robert. Let me see you pass him along."

"No clubs the first hand around, you murdering blackguard?" the irate gentleman demanded. "I stand to give you three in the next five seconds." He was lively and talkative at first, but later in the game he became sober over his diminishing pile of chips, and settled down to business. It is possible to lose much, and rapidly, at a dollar a heart, and Mr. Floyd played to win.

Courtenay was having "beginner's luck," and when they rose from the table he felt considerably elated at the good fortune which had attended him. The inconvenient old proverb never once obtruded itself until Mr. Floyd, who was also a winner, reminded him of it. Mr. Jones went into the dining-room to brew a parting beverage. "Mixing is his forte," Livingston explained to the stranger within his gates. "He is better at liqueurs than at colors. His principal achievement in the artistic line has been painting the town red."

"Still painting John T. Kennan's portrait, Jonesey?" Fielding demanded.

A Victim of Circumstances

"John T. Kennan be hanged!" Mr. Jones sang out from the dining-room. "I swore I wouldn't finish it until he sent me a check, and he swore he wouldn't send me a check until I had finished it. He would come around to the studio and argue with me, and I would touch up his eye-glasses and his necktie, and he would say, 'Yes, yes, that change in the expression greatly improves the likeness.' I would gently intimate to him that my terms were cash, and he would find fault with the background. Hang me if I don't paint a pair of asses' ears on it, and exhibit it as a portrait of Kennan the novelist, by Jove."

"Then he will put asses' ears on you in his next book," said Livingston, warningly.

"That is no distinction. I never read trash, but I'm told that all his characters are unmitigated donkeys, just as he is," said Mr. Jones. "He's the kind of an ass who is delightful if you can turn him out to grass when you've had enough of him, and insupportable when you're obliged to have dealings with him. Just at present my stock-piece is a portrait of our house-cat. Taste this, Tom. You are the fault-finder."

"It's good, Lockjaw. The Academy wouldn't reject this," said Lawrence, approvingly.

"I told Kennan," Mr. Jones pursued, resorting to his original theme, "that if he wanted his portrait painted for nothing, he'd better go to Percival, who painted for amusement, but that I painted on business principles, and my terms were cash. He said that he did not like you, Sidney—that you had re-

We Visit a Fashionable Watering-Place

viewed his books once too often, and he feared you were a purse-proud snob."

"Yet I did the best I could for him. I reviewed them without reading them," said Percival, retrospectively. "What did he say about Bobby? It is sweet to know the opinions of one's contemporaries."

"He called Bobby a harmless lunatic," said Mr. Jones, "but I told him that was putting it too strong—that Bobby wasn't harmless."

At this cut Mr. Floyd set up a prodigious noise, and was silenced only by a portion of Mr. Jones's concoction. He was in high spirits, and vowed that he had been an idiot to remain so long in Fortmount-house. "That is an uncommonly attractive house," he said to Courtenay the next day when they met at Mrs. Collier's, and the young man was fain to agree with him. He was surprised at the change in Bobby's manner and mode of life, and as one day succeeded another fresh shocks were in store for him, for the lively gentleman not only adapted himself to the society in which he found himself, but actually outheroed Herod. In the country he had appeared a cheerful, gregarious person, of simple tastes, a child of nature, with no worse vices than a love of meddling and gossip; but he now allowed himself ample license for whatever was pleasing to him, spent money recklessly, indulged more freely in play than was compatible with his means, and appeared on more than one occasion the worse for his copious potations. The cottage was indeed an attractive house, and a favorite lounging place for a set of men for whose society the lively gentleman

A Victim of Circumstances

had a hankering—hard-headed, ready of tongue, more or less long of purse, easy-going, and tolerant of many things. Some were musical, some were admirable mimics and raconteurs; all were blessed with that *savoir vivre* which alone can lend a zest to unworthy leisure, and which Courtenay lacked, to his sorrow. Perhaps Mr. Floyd's manners were not sufficiently good to be corrupted by evil communications, and perhaps his superficiality stood him in good stead, for certainly he was more benefited by his associations than Courtenay was. To the young Englishman the atmosphere of the house was not improving, and when Trevor came down to Newport on a flying visit he noticed the change in his cousin and spoke of it to Percival.

"He is more like his father than I thought," he said. "Of course, the old man knows twice as much, and has infinitely better manners, but the blood is coming out fast. He used to be a nice, honest boy, but he's getting over it."

"I haven't seen much of him lately," Percival said, who was less at home than the others. "I believe he and Jones have struck up a tremendous intimacy, and Bobby fancies that he is running the concern."

"Does he play poker with Jones, I wonder?" Trevor asked. "I never saw such dead luck as Lockjaw has. I never managed to win a cent from him in my life, and I've tried religiously for years."

"Did you ever know Lockjaw to love any one who wouldn't play poker with him?" his friend demanded.

We Visit a Fashionable Watering-Place

"And to think that I've kept the cards out of his sight, as though he were a boarding-school girl," said Trevor, regretfully. "I give you my word, I've been playing animal grab and slap-jack all summer."

"No doubt it has done you good," said Percival. "Getting close to nature, you know."

"We have almost done with idyls for the present," said Trevor. "The first of September and the general are approaching. You must be on hand for the regular fall spree." He himself was looking forward to it with considerable anticipation. The quiet of the country had begun to pall upon him. He wanted to consult Percival about buying a house, as Madam Trevor had consented to allow the wedding to take place in December. He also gave Mr. Jones a commission to paint the portrait of his future wife. "I wish *you* would paint a little head of Clip for me," he said, persuasively. "I should like it for a wedding present—my wife by my best friend."

Percival answered, mendaciously, that he could not do justice to the subject. He was fresh from a long and intimate discussion of his friend's affairs, and weariness filled his soul. Now he stood by the billiard-table, practising impossible shots, and wishing with all his heart that Trevor were less communicative and expansive, and that he could get away somewhere—anywhere—beyond the reach of confidences.

"A portrait always flatters or falls short of the mark, but if any one can satisfy me, you are the man," Trevor assured him, and Percival had an

A Victim of Circumstances

uncomfortable, if fleeting, vision of the sittings which would certainly be pressed upon him by the prospective bridegroom, and which neither he nor Clip could well refuse without adding awkwardness to a situation already sufficiently painful. He had hoped to paint her portrait under very different circumstances, poor man—circumstances which involved no parting with the likeness or the original; but he felt now that he had never had the ghost of a chance from the first. She had cared for Roy from the beginning. Her anger at his neglect, the little piqued manner with which she had responded to his lazy overtures, her disapproval and disdain, all had signified the same truth, which he had been too blind to discover. He looked at his friend, lounging on the divan, and accorded him the ungrudging admiration which physical beauty always evoked from him. Why should she have cared for him when Roy was there? It was not surprising that, while his wooing had only frightened her, Trevor's had been successful.

"You must dine with us once a week, Sid," the happy man was saying. "We will have it a regular thing, and then there will be no crawling out of it. Won't Clip look pretty at the head of the table?"

"Don't be rash. She will be desperately tired of me," said Percival. "Where do you think I am going to-night, by-the-way? To Mother Winchester's birthday dinner. We fall on each other's necks now when we meet. I have grown vastly superior, you see."

That night Mr. Floyd, who had been to a dinner

We Visit a Fashionable Watering-Place

and two dances, ran into Courtenay on the steps of the cottage. "It's to-morrow morning already," the lively gentleman observed. "You don't mean that you have been here all the evening?"

"Why not?" Courtenay asked. "It is far more entertaining than the place you come from."

"What luck?" Mr. Floyd inquired. He spoke carefully and with an obvious effort, leaning on the balustrade, and letting the ashes of his cigarette fall on his waistcoat unnoticed.

"None of the best," Courtenay answered. "Jones was the winner to-night."

"When was he ever anything else?" Mr. Floyd demanded. "For dead luck commend me to Lock-jaw. He's fairly smeared with it. If he were to fall into a sewer, he'd come up with a diamond chain around his neck. What's the use of playing with a fellow like that? Rather monotonous, I call it. Put a nickel in the slot, and see him sweep the board."

"I play for the game, not for the winnings," said Courtenay.

"I'm glad you can afford it. I can't," said Mr. Floyd. "The fact is, I'm going home, and if you're wise, you'll come too while you have the price of a ticket in your clothes."

"Oh, stuff, Bobby. See here, I'll walk home with you," said Courtenay.

"You think I'm drunk," said Mr. Floyd, with dignity. "What if I am? I know better than to play with fellows who can buy and sell me. I ought never to have brought you here, and that's a fact."

A Victim of Circumstances

I told Roy as much to-day, but he acted as usual about it."

"How is that?"

"Lifted his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders, and said he wasn't your keeper."

"He was playing himself this evening. They all played but Percival. He is never at home," said Courtenay.

"Well, now, I'm your friend," said Mr. Floyd, with whom, indeed, the young man had become vastly intimate, "and I tell you that you don't trot in the same class with those fellows. I'm going back to Fortmounthouse. Better go home, I say. Better go home."

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH MR. PERCY TOWNSHEND SUCCORS A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

“THE general proposes driving from New York with a party of men, and will be here the second of September,” Madam Trevor wrote to Roy. “He telegraphed that he had invited three ladies to spend a week here, and that he trusted I should find them congenial. One is a Mrs. Acres, who has written to me accepting *my* invitation (I have never sent one to *my* knowledge), and saying that she is an old friend of yours. The others are a Miss Aldice and Mrs. Horace Fielding’s niece, whose engagement was broken off last winter. I shall keep the girls just long enough to see the general, and shall send them to my sister at Pelham before the rest of the party arrive. Maria will go with them, and if you would like to take charge of them as far as the Suburban depot, it would be a great relief to me. I suppose you will return to Fortmounthouse for a part, at least, of the general’s visit. I am still in ignorance of his plans, but I hear from outside sources that he is expecting to entertain most lavishly. The girls complain of dulness, and will not be sorry for a change. Marjorie is learning to mark linen

A Victim of Circumstances

very nicely, and I shall, of course, stock her closets with everything she will need for ten years to come. I have advised her to wear a blue veil in the garden to preserve her complexion. It is foolish to send her so much jewelry, which she certainly cannot wear yet. I have put the pendant away in my safe, and should advise you to send no more ornaments or candy at present."

Unfortunately Madam Trevor's plans were as liable to reverses as those of less important and provident people, and, having settled every detail of the departures and arrivals, supervised the packing of trunks and the airing of rooms, a remote contingency materialized into an insurmountable obstacle, and her prospects were thwarted by a malign fate. It was the afternoon of the second of September. Clip and Jim had gone down to the station in the pony carriage to meet Trevor, who was to escort them to Pelham on the following day, and enliven their stay by sundry excursions to town. Mr. Floyd had been at home for some days, and Courtenay was once more at his lodgings in the village. So unapproachable was Madam Trevor's mood that the house was a good place to leave, and Spriggy, who had been rebuked for putting on a particularly smart black-and-red gown, went for a solitary walk, regardless of high-heeled slippers and lace ruffles. From a corner of Percival's wall the old turnpike road was visible for miles, and she climbed this point of vantage to get the first glimpse of the general's drag as it drew near Fortmounthouse. The cement crumbled as she did so, and the stones settled under

Mr. Percy Townshend Succors a Damsel

her weight. "Grandmamma is right. He really ought to build it over. Some one will surely get hurt here," she thought. "Though, of course, a wall isn't made to climb on."

A little cloud of dust far down the road attracted her attention, and she expected to hear the long notes of the coach horn which heralded the general's approach; but as the cloud drew nearer she perceived that its authors were not four horses, but a small drove of cattle, in charge of a half-grown boy. Now Spriggy had been chased and tossed by a cow in her too-venturesome childhood, and the sight of brandished horns still created a panic in her breast. She thought of her red gown, and prepared for flight, but the wall wavered ominously when she turned towards the field, and her scarlet parasol, which she had left open in the roadside grass, availed itself of a gust of wind to bob in a most offensive manner before the eyes of a frisky heifer that led the van. Spriggy saw her approach it suspiciously, lower her head, and charge the offending sunshade. The other cows immediately broke their ranks, and in a moment several brown heads with fearful, gleaming horns appeared close to the wall, while the boy, grinning unkindly, made a half-hearted effort to collect his herd once more, but did not attempt to rescue either the terrified Spriggy or her property, which by this time was rent in a dozen places. Common-sense forsook her, high heels and flounced petticoats impeded her, and finally the stone on which she perched precariously settled under her weight, throwing her off her balance, wrenching

A Victim of Circumstances

her ankle, and hurling her to her knees on the safe side of the wall, amid a shower of stones and dirt. As she fell she fainted, and subsided into a miserable little heap of crushed finery under the shadow of the ruined wall.

When she regained consciousness the desolation of her situation quite overwhelmed her. She sat up and rubbed her aching elbow, sadly calculating the distance to the nearest house, which in her present state seemed endless to her. The Percivals never walked over their own acres, and from the road no passing traveller could see and succor the crumpled heap of whilom elegance reposing on the sunburnt grass. If she could only manage to creep home through the fields without exposing her plight to the critical eye of her uncle Edward—that terrible eye which could detect a dull button or a crooked strap across the parade-ground—she felt that she could better endure the strictures on her folly which inevitably awaited her at home; but when she tried to scramble to her feet a violent pain in her ankle warned her that her inventory of injuries was not yet complete. “I certainly can’t walk a step without some kind of a crutch,” she said to herself. “Besides, I feel horribly shaken to pieces.” A second and a third attempt to bear her weight on the left foot proved equally vain. As she sat there she heard the familiar rattle of the pony carriage, and knew that Clip and Roy were returning from the station; but though she called to them, they did not hear her, and the rattle died away in the distance. “Suppose I have to stay here all night?” she thought.

Mr. Percy Townshend Succors a Damsel

"They will never think of looking for me here. Oh, dear, there is the horn!" Anxious as she was to be found, despite her swimming head and throbbing ankle, she fervently hoped that no one would spy her from the top of the drag; and when they passed at a brisk trot, she breathed a sigh of relief at her escape from the scrutiny of that terrible martinet on the box, erect, handsome, with waxed mustache and bronzed skin, the beau ideal of a distinguished cavalry officer. The horn wound its salute to Fortmounthouse, growing fainter as the horses dashed around the curve towards the river, and Spriggy was left once more alone.

She began to make calculations. The next train was not due until half past six. At that time Mr. Leonard would be driving down to meet his son, but Mr. Leonard was deaf. Some of the Floyds might go to The Cedars, or Mrs. Percival might drive to Graystone, but the chances of either were small. The shadows had lengthened rapidly, and the air was getting damp. Already the general must have greeted his mother and nephew, administered a frosty peck to Clip and Jim, and was looking about for her. He always affected to be dazzled with the improvement which these periods of absence rendered more noticeable, and called her his lovely niece. She wondered what sort of muster his lovely niece would pass if he were to see her now. The crickets and frogs began their dismal chorus, and tears of loneliness sprang to her eyes. She began to draw depressing pictures of the feelings of her family when they found her dead in the morning. Through

A Victim of Circumstances

the trees she could see lights in the windows of Mrs. Percival's dining-room, and her own dinnerless condition smote her with fresh pity for herself. By this time she did not care who saw her, or how absurd they might find her accident. The ludicrous had given way to the tragic, and even the general would have been a welcome sight to her. Finally, in the dead stillness, a footstep was audible, and with reviving hope she called as loudly as she could, "Please come here, somebody!"

The footsteps ceased, and a dark figure paused, then cautiously approached, searching half incredulously for the owner of the voice. "Be careful of the wall," said Spriggy. "It tumbled down with me."

"I will come by the gate," said her rescuer. She recognized his voice. It was Percy Townshend.

"Where are you?" he called presently, "and who is it?"

"Oh, Mr. Townshend, it is Rose Harcourt, and I think I have broken my ankle," said Spriggy. "I have been sitting here ever since five o'clock, and I can't get up."

"Miss Harcourt! I could not believe my ears," said Percy, in dismay. "How did you meet with an accident in such a place?"

"I climbed the wall to get away from the cows," said Spriggy, incoherently, "and the stones began to slide, and down I went. I came out to see the general, and I don't know what grandmamma must think by this time. Oh, I am so glad you have come! I couldn't have endured those awful frogs a minute longer."

Mr. Percy Townshend Succors a Damsel

"It was fairly providential that I happened to be on my way to the Floyds'," said Percy. "I can't tell you how distressed I am. Is your injury very painful?"

"I could stand the aching," said Spriggy, "but I feel so ignominious. Besides, I can't walk. I don't know how I shall ever get away from this dreadful place."

"If you will stay here just a moment longer, I will go to the house and get a lantern, and order the carriage," said Percy. "I will not be gone long. I will run all the way. You won't be afraid?"

"No, only it seems worse than ever to be left alone now," she answered, dismally.

In a surprisingly short time he was back again, out of breath, but armed with a lantern. "They are harnessing the horses," he said, "and Aunt Louise is coming herself, with the gardener. Good heavens, Miss Harcourt, what a mercy that you were not killed! Did all these stones fall when you did?"

"Yes, I nearly pulled the wall down," said Spriggy.

His face showed severe and indignant by the light of the lantern. "It is culpable carelessness on Sidney's part," he said. "And it came near costing a life. I—I—" For once words failed him, and he stood looking very helpless and agitated until Mrs. Percival arrived with the carriage. Mrs. Percival was a person of tact and resource, and it was not until poor Spriggy had been safely conveyed to the house and a messenger despatched for Madam Trevor and the doctor that her horror and

A Victim of Circumstances

self-reproach at the nature of the accident found vent in tears. "I hate to find fault with Sidney," she said, "but, really, Percy is right, and because one happens to care nothing for a place one's self, one needn't allow it to get into a positively dangerous condition. Of course, now, he will have the wall rebuilt, and I shall telegraph him to-night what has happened. I wish it had been some person we didn't know, who would have sued for damages. That would have been a lesson to him, but this will simply break his heart."

"I wish you wouldn't tell him," said Spriggy.

Before long Madam Trevor appeared, accompanied by Roy, and insisted that her granddaughter should return at once with her and receive the doctor there. The magnate was unsympathetic, and, if the truth be avowed, most unpleasant, as dominant persons are apt to be when fate for once plays a trick upon them. As Trevor was helping his hapless cousin to the carryall he imparted to her in confidence the news that a telegram had arrived during her absence from Madam's sister, Mrs. Guerri, advising a postponement of the girls' visit, as she felt too ill to entertain young people. "She is ready to chew nails, poor old thing," he said. "She didn't want you and Clip to meet Mrs. Acres."

"She is a great friend of yours, isn't she?" Spriggy asked.

"I am in her black-books," said Trevor, "because I didn't write to her about Clip. Why, I didn't even write to Sidney. People are so foolish to expect things of me! She knows I never write letters."

Mr. Percy Townshend Succors a Damsel

The general was smoking in the hall, surrounded by visitors, for all the young men of the neighborhood promptly paid their respects to him whenever he appeared, and were included in the festivities that celebrated his arrival. He was fond of young people when not called upon to support them. The friends whom he had brought with him were all greatly his juniors, with the exception of one dried-up little individual known as "the younger Kearney," chiefly because, somewhere in the background, there lurked an older Kearney. The others were old cronies of Roy's, who so far had comported themselves with great discretion under the Argus eyes of their hostess, though conscious of her suspicion that such decorous and seemly bearing was but transitory. At the moment of his mother's return the general was planning a ball in honor of his niece and daughter, with Lander to play for the dancing, and two Hungarian children to perform on their national instruments during supper, which was to be served at a horseshoe table, over which he himself would preside. He rose and greeted Spriggy with effusion. "Ah, my lovely niece, I was just planning something for your pleasure when I heard the desolating news. Surely, with the prospect of a ball to help you, you should be in dancing trim again by the eighteenth."

"We shall see what the doctor says," Madam Trevor replied, grimly. She detested ostentation and extravagance, and she knew the general's entertainments and their cost. She ordered Spriggy to bed, and sent Clip up to sit with her until the

A Victim of Circumstances

arrival of the doctor. She also disposed in short order of Percy Townshend, who stopped in to inquire on his way back from the Floyds'. "A slight sprain. The doctor considers it a matter of no consequence. Tell your aunts that a week's rest is all it needs. There is no cause for anxiety. Good-evening." Poor Percy's eyes swept the room in wistful search of a golden head and a white frock, not from a partiality for Clip's society, of whom, indeed, and her too obvious loveliness he was a trifle afraid, but from a desire to learn from more sympathetic lips the condition of a young woman who had already cost him some anxious moments.

CHAPTER XVIII

DEPICTS A STRUGGLE BETWEEN RIVAL POTENTATES, AND THE OVERTHROW OF THE MIGHTIEST BY FATE

THE general was flying about the tennis-court with commendable vigor when his mother drove around the oval on her way to the village, while Bobby, Courtenay, and one of the visiting men found their principal occupation in stopping stray balls. It is not given to every one to be an Admirable Crichton, and certainly the general's tennis was very bad.

"See here," said Mr. Floyd, watching a sky-cleaving return with absolute indifference as to where it came down, for it was not advisable to beat the distinguished general officer by too great odds, "won't this sickness of Mrs. Guerry's stop the ball? The old lady seems pretty well cut up about it."

"The old man would be more cut up about it," said Linnard. "I haven't heard anything about calling in the cards. Perhaps she will be all right by the eighteenth."

"I feel it in my bones that she's going to peg out," Mr. Floyd declared. "What do you bet that he gives the shindy all the same?"

A Victim of Circumstances

"It's stuff staying in for people you don't care about," Mr. Linnard opined. "Not that I care a hang for balls, but the old boy has set his heart on it, and it's too bad to disappoint him."

"Did you never hear that 'the Trevors never follow precedents; they create them'?" asked Bobby. "Trust him to do as he pleases, and revel in an easy conscience afterwards. By Jove, there's old Sid coming up the drive. I thought you were in Newport," he yelled out, brandishing his racquet.

Percival wasted little time upon the tennis-players. He hurried to the house, where he found the engaged pair sociably doing nothing in the hall. Roy made a fuss over him, and Clip behaved very prettily and as though nothing had happened. It was as well that he should accustom himself to seeing them together. Their road in life was the same, and stretched forward through many years. "I have come to build walls," he said. "Where is Spriggy? I must see her."

"They wheel her sofa into the hall above, and we all go there to sit with her," said Clip. "Won't you come up?"

Spriggy, in an elaborate pink tea-gown, was reclining among her cushions ready for visitors, and Madam Trevor was not at hand to pass judgment, when Clip ushered him into her cousin's presence and left him to make his apologies without witnesses. He knelt beside the sofa, and took her hand. "I came as soon as I knew what had happened," he said. "Percy has been lecturing me for two hours, but indeed I need no sermons

A Struggle Between Rival Potentates

from any one but you. I really wish you would trample on me. I think it would soothe my feelings."

"The doctor says I am not to trample on any one until next Thursday," said Spriggy, laughing. "Don't feel badly about it. I was trespassing, you know, and now they can't send me to Pelham."

"But I do feel badly," said Percival, "and so would you, if you had come within an ace of killing your best friend."

"I believe it was the only thing that would have torn you away from Newport," said Spriggy. "Everybody has told me how jolly you all were there. It is only in Fortmounthouse that you look like this. It seems a pity that you should be forced to come where you are so unhappy."

"I'm not—" he began, then broke off with a little hopeless laugh. "Haven't I everything to make me happy? So, if I don't flourish like a green bay-tree, I have nobody to blame but myself."

"I don't see why there need be any occasion for blame," she protested.

"We were talking of me, were we not?" he asked. "It is a dull subject enough. Suppose we leave it."

"I knew that when the time came that I could be of any comfort to you, you would not tell me," said Spriggy.

"My dear girl, why are you so extravagantly good to me?" he asked. "The account was too unevenly balanced between us, even before this happened. Does it make a thing hurt less to talk about it? Well, if you want the truth, I have had

A Victim of Circumstances

a disappointment—as you know—and I have got to get over it. That is all.”

“I am afraid it is going to be hard work,” said Spriggy.

“Fortunately for me, my hopes were necessarily short-lived,” said Percival. “They had not become a habit with me. My habits are hard to break—probably a good deal harder than my heart.”

The younger Kearney had been to town, and met Percival on the stairs as he ascended to remove the grime of the Hudson River Road from his disingenuous countenance. He commented on the circumstance later, in the interval before dinner. “Percival seems to have the run of the house,” he said to Linnard and Courtenay. “I fear *my* flawless demeanor is as pearls before swine. The old woman can’t draw the line so strictly after all—or else she hasn’t heard about that Tracy affair.”

“Or else,” said Linnard, who was not a tactful person, “she is going to marry him to Miss Harcourt.”

“He’s a heartless devil,” Kearney opined.

“Oh, come, now,” Linnard protested, “he was awfully good to her, and to the whole family, when Tracy hadn’t a cent to bless himself with. I have it from Bobby that he sold his horses to fish that fellow out of some hole or other—for her sake, of course—and a poor enough return he got for it all.”

“One doesn’t expect a more tangible one,” said Kearney. “Which should you prefer, eternal gratitude or a latch-key?”

“They say Tracy beat her,” Linnard remarked.

A Struggle Between Rival Potentates

"Oh, I dare say, when he found the golden eggs running smaller," said Kearney. "It's a curious thing, but I happened to be living there in the 'Bellfontain' when she left her husband. She wasn't as discreet as she might be. She came into the hall, evidently screwed up to do something desperate, and not caring who knew it. I was going out just then, and she said good-bye to me. Of course I knew that some trouble or other was brewing. She let me put her into a cab, and, when I asked if I might tell the man where to go, she gave me Percival's address. This was on a Saturday night, at about eleven o'clock. Do you wonder that it made them conspicuous?"

"That sort of thing is pretty hard on a man, all the same," Linnard persisted, "especially if he happens to be tired of her."

The French window behind them closed with a warning click. "I wonder who that was?" Kearney said, unconcernedly. "Not the old lady, I trust."

His trust proved to be, perhaps deservedly, unfounded. Madam Trevor was in the parlor, receiving a call of inquiry from Percy Townshend, and both had heard enough of the conversation to make concealment a farce. It was the magnate who closed the window; it was Percy who at length supplied her with a reason for the dislike she had always secretly cherished for him, by making immediate and, as it seemed to him, needful allusion to the subject. "Of course," he said, growing pompous in his earnestness and embarrassment, "a lady of your years and experience would be

A Victim of Circumstances

most unlikely to lend her ear to idle gossip like this. Happily, I am in a position to affirm that these reports are grossly exaggerated and untrue. It is a most unfortunate fact that a man cannot allow his sympathies to be enlisted in behalf of any woman without laying his motives open to the cruelest misinterpretation. I have never been in Sidney's confidence, but I feel sure that he has never been guilty of more than the pardonable indiscretions of a very young man."

Madam Trevor was relieved to discover her reasons for never having liked this unexceptionable young man. She had more respect for Percival, however she might disapprove of him, and more secret tolerance for the impertinent Bobby, than for their steady-going cousin, whom she now proceeded to pulverize after her own fashion. "I am, as you say, an old woman, Mr. Townshend," she answered with dignity, "and a woman of some experience. I don't act with the 'pardonable indiscretion of a very young man,' neither am I in the habit of allowing strangers to dictate my opinions to me. I had no intention of noticing what was not meant for my ears, but, since you have forced it upon my attention, I can assure you that you have gained nothing by your interference."

"Excuse me, Mrs. Trevor, I was not attempting to dictate to you. I trust I should never so far forget myself," the luckless Percy protested. "I merely ventured to say a word in my cousin's defence—"

"Who is fully capable of speaking for himself,"

A Struggle Between Rival Potentates

Madam Trevor interpolated, "if he is given the opportunity. And as I know that he can't be far from thirty, I trust he would not be so foolish as to plead his youth in extenuation of his foolishness."

"You won't mention it to him?" cried poor Percy in alarm and mortification. He was overwhelmed with his own impropriety in alluding to the matter at all, and only his real devotion to his cousin had spurred him to so shocking a breach of etiquette.

"I shall do as I think best," said the magnate, conclusively, and the poor young man departed with the uncomfortable conviction that he had incurred the enmity of the person of all others (next to his uncle) with whom he wished to stand well.

What trial and sentence would have been accorded Percival, had time been vouchsafed his self-appointed judge, is hidden from the speculative eye, for that very evening her labors were transferred to a new field. She was holding a private conversation with the general—an interview which was not of his seeking, but which he strove to render so all-sufficing that she would not speedily crave another. "It is all nonsense to say that you can't do without Lander," she assured him, "and as for a screen of palms, it is a wicked extravagance which I, for one, have no intention of countenancing. If I am to pay for an entertainment, as I generally do sooner or later for yours, I propose to draw the line between proper liberality and a vulgar display which nobody requires of you."

"It is only a step from frugality to avarice," said the general, loftily, "and at its best, prudence is a

A Victim of Circumstances

very sordid virtue. I admit that I don't care to drag my soul down to the level of an account-book. We have but one life to live, and why, for Heaven's sake, should we lead it to the tune of dollars and cents?"

"Some of us have to dance to that tune in order that others may turn a deaf ear to it," said Madam Trevor.

"I propose to dance to the tune of Lander's orchestra," her son replied promptly, "and eat truffles to the strains of the Hungarian band. Your establishment costs you next to nothing. You will have all winter before you to revel in petty thrift; but, if you won't kill the fatted calf for me, I suppose you can have no objection to my killing it for myself."

"Marjorie's marriage will be a heavy expense to me," said the magnate; "I suppose you would not expect me to send the child into the world quite unprovided for?"

"I will send her a check," said the general. "Or let her buy whatever is proper, and send the bill to me. If I had been consulted in the matter, I should have settled something on her."

Madam Trevor sniffed—a sniff of long experience—and said "Come in" in answer to a timid rap on the door. It was Ira, with a telegram. The old lady opened and read it. "Your aunt Elizabeth is worse," she said, in a steady voice. "They expect me at once. Of course you will recall your cards for the ball, and I shall remind you once more that the girls are very young, and that I am forced to

A Struggle Between Rival Potentates

leave them in your charge." She went about the house, giving her parting orders, energetic and tearless, packed her own trunk, exhorted each member of her family, and the next morning departed, escorted to the train by Clip and Jim, who saw her as the cars moved off, sitting motionless and erect, her hands folded on the ends of her camel's-hair shawl, and the fringes of her frayed lace veil playing upon her face, set in that nullity of expression which it behooved a travelling Trevor to exhibit to the people one met in public conveyances. Meanwhile the general was driving four-in-hand, and Clip and Spriggy were feeling a little awe-struck and guilty at this unexpected opportunity of tasting the long-desired sweets of independence. For the first time in many years the Duchess of Fortmounthouse had deserted her post.

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN THE CAT'S AWAY

WHEN the three visiting ladies arrived, ruefully escorted by a Mr. Lacy, who hated and feared women, they found afternoon tea ready on the piazza, with a frightened little hostess presiding over the forbidden innovation. Spriggy, who had been carried down-stairs in a chair, sat with her injured ankle on a cushion, and sipped her tea, half expecting to see her grandmother enter at any moment. It is true that the general had ordered it, but a flutter of fear added to the enjoyment even of the brazen Mr. Floyd, who announced, cup in hand, "I'm coming every day in the week now, can't I, general?"

Mrs. Acres showed every disposition to make herself agreeable to the company. She was plump and compact, with a saucy nose and an enviable wardrobe. Miss Aldice was a fine, gentlemanly girl, and Maggie Fielding was distinctly pretty, with a genius for doing risky things in a deprecating manner. The general was in his element. Surrounded by a trio of admiring women, flattered, cajoled, and amused, he beamed upon the assemblage and embarked upon his famous story of the battle

When the Cat's Away

of Saddler's Creek, which his family knew well, and dreaded accordingly. Roy was late in appearing, and with his arrival the hero of the narrative lost one of his listeners. Mrs. Acres extended both hands to her old friend, turned her shoulder to the tea-table, and began to pay him audible compliments on his good taste, even while she overwhelmed him with reproaches for not telling her of his exceptional fortune in person. She found Clip ravishing, delightful, a little nun fresh from the convent. Well, it was a relief to find that he was not going to throw himself away on a plain woman, as handsome men usually did. But how absurd that the general should have a daughter old enough to be married! Nobody would believe it—and nobody believed that Roy Trevor was really going to settle down. "Pray remember that my reputation is spotless," said Trevor. "Don't confuse me with the many virtuous young men whom you have blighted. You know my love for you was an ennobling sentiment." The younger Kearney was handing cups for Clip, and paying her extravagant compliments which embarrassed her, but nobody came to the rescue. Spriggy, instigated by the unworthy Linnard, was tormenting poor Lacy with unwelcome attentions, and Bobby fluttered from one group to another, gobbling and gossiping with gusto.

Courtenay came to dinner that night. He had conceived a great admiration for the general, who was indeed a most brilliant and dashing personage, and who relished the young man's tendency to

A Victim of Circumstances

hero-worship when the hero in question was himself. Courtenay had, besides, the advantage of playing a worse game of billiards than the general, and of sitting at his feet in the matter of rifle-practice, and, as he bore comments on his whist-playing with angelic meekness, he stood in no present danger of a fall from favor. Spriggy paid little attention to him. She sat at the head of the table, and devoted herself to Linnard, who sat beside her. Lacy sulked forlornly at her other hand, and the younger Kearney paid desperate court to Clip, who snubbed him royally. Bobby had returned to the charms of his old flame, Miss Fielding, and the general divided his favors between Mrs. Acres and Miss Aldice. Roy was at Mrs. Acres's right hand, and the lively lady did not allow him to feel neglected. She was certainly very amusing. Her end of the table was in a continual roar. The others grew preoccupied, and strained their ears to catch the conversation. Trevor also appeared to be excruciatingly witty, and it was really very irritating that his cousins were unable to hear what he was saying. Once only did Mrs. Acres's voice soar shrilly above the din: "If you think I'm funny now, you ought to see me when I'm drunk." Spriggy and Clip fairly shivered, and expected to behold their grandmother, grim and awful, routing this shameless person from her decorous abode, but the rafters did not fall to crush the bold guest, and as the meal drew to a close she produced a gold cigarette case and asked Trevor for a light. "We are going to have a play," she said, reading horror

When the Cat's Away

in Clip's eyes. "Can either of you girls act? We want somebody to speak virtuous lines, and look pretty, and wear her hair in a braid. I can't do that myself. I have just enough left to tie a switch to. I tore the rest of it out when I heard that Roy had deserted me, Miss Trevor."

"Take your choice quickly between us, then, before we both become bald," said Spriggy, "for he hasn't spoken to us since you came."

"In that case I will try to find parts for both of you," Mrs. Acres said, obligingly. "Now, general, I hope you won't refuse to be our leading man. You are so cool and collected. The hero of a hundred battles couldn't possibly succumb to stage-fright."

"My dear lady, I have never acted," said the general, with the air of one who wards off well-deserved praise. "I did not care to set the example to the post. But now you recall to me that many people have asked me why I didn't act. I am often accused of concealing a talent."

"Then you will?" cried the moving spirit. "If you will promise to take part, we are sure of a howling success."

"I will make the attempt, to please you," said the general, gallantly. "We will have a stage erected in the back drawing-room, and open the ball with a little dramatic surprise."

"We sha'n't have to instruct you in creating a favorable impression on your audience," said Miss Aldice.

"Or in winning the ladies' hearts," said Kearney.

A Victim of Circumstances

"Here's to our host," said Mrs. Acres, jumping up, glass in hand. "General, it isn't leap-year, but may I have the first waltz?"

At this juncture, young Jim, who had been drowsily nodding over his dessert for some time, suddenly came to life with a shrill giggle, and dug Mr. Floyd in the ribs. Mr. Floyd promptly emptied his finger-bowl over the youth's head, and Clip, much shocked, conveyed him to the foot of the stairs, lectured him, and sent him to bed. There was a general move in the direction of the piazza, where it was dark and mild, and Mrs. Acres proceeded to select and cast the two little plays which were to give scope for the assembled talent. "Roy, you will act?" said she. "And Bobby, of course. Where is Sidney Percival? He is really good in a comedy part."

"Yes, but he won't take the trouble to learn his lines," said Miss Aldice.

"Set him to teaching Mr. Trevor, then. He'll do that admirably," Miss Fielding suggested.

"I shall coach Roy myself," said Mrs. Acres. "I know that he is lazy, but he will do it for me, just to prove that he didn't mean anything invidious by his awful neglect." She had her hand on his arm as she spoke, and was making him stroll up and down the piazza, "for his digestion," as she told him. Clip was talking to Courtenay, and Lacy had escaped to a secluded corner where his tormentors could not pursue him. The general, weary at length of the digestive promenade, suggested music.

When the Cat's Away

"I didn't know that Mrs. Acres sang," Bobby observed, seeing the little procession on its way to the piano.

"That sort of woman always sings," Miss Harcourt observed, with quite unusual asperity.

CHAPTER XX

AN AMERICAN NIGHT'S ENTERTAINMENT

WE are often angry with our friends because they do not know by intuition those things which we have most sedulously endeavored to conceal from them, and Spriggy, who would not for worlds have had her cousin made miserable through a useless jealousy, was provoked by the serenity with which Clip regarded her future husband's attentions to his old friend. During the week which preceded the theatricals every one seemed to take peculiar pleasure in the society of the wrong person, and, to quote Mr. Floyd, there was a new deal all around. Clip was teaching Courtenay his part, which, by the way, was that of her lover in the play, and the fickle Bobby had deserted to Miss Fielding. Percival, when he came at all, devoted himself to Spriggy, and Percy Townshend stayed away. Mrs. Guerry's condition was still serious, and great scandal was created in the neighborhood by the fact that the general would not recall his cards, but all Fortmounthouse stood ready to hold up its hands and shake its head at the ball.

A seamstress was remodelling a white tulle gown of Spriggy's for her cousin, who had not yet

An American Night's Entertainment

attained the dignity of a ball-dress of her own, and Ira, with brushes on his feet, was skating about on the newly waxed floor, when the florist's man arrived, and also a most strenuous epistle from Madam Trevor, enclosing a clipping from a society journal, which described the coming festivities. "You will be annoyed, as I was, to read this silly canard," she wrote to the general. "I shall leave you to rectify it, if you consider it worthy of attention. It is doubly irritating, coming as it does at the most critical period of your aunt's illness; and while no one who knows us could credit us with such heartless bad taste, I naturally prefer that we should not be represented as entertaining at such a time." The general threw the letter into the scrap-basket, and went into the hall to superintend the decorations. The carpenters had finished the stage, and were putting in the footlights, and Percival, who had declined to take a part, had been pressed into the service as stage-manager, and was painting flies with great liberality of pigments. Mrs. Acres sat on the conservatory steps, looking towards the village. "I have some cousins down there," she said to Trevor. "They cross themselves when they hear my name. If I had time, I would call on them—but it's nearly over now."

"What is over?" he asked.

"All this. Day after to-morrow I shall be in Richfield, sewing on buttons and crying, and you will be telling Miss Trevor that I am not a nice person for her to associate with. Or else you won't talk about me at all, which will be worse."

A Victim of Circumstances

"Oh, you'll be talked about. Never fear," said Trevor, kindly.

"By everybody? That isn't what I mean," said Mrs. Acres. "Besides, I have behaved uncommonly well. I haven't even made the natives sit up. I've been a perfect lady, drunk or sober."

"Still, you seem discontented," said Trevor. "I am afraid you don't find virtue its own reward."

"It's a very inadequate one at best," she answered. "Perhaps that is why I don't indulge in it oftener. By the way, Mr. Courtenay is engaged to your other cousin, isn't he? There seemed to be some sort of an understanding between them when I first came, but lately I have thought I must be mistaken."

"He will be a lucky man if he gets her," said Trevor.

"How nice that your little maid seems to like him so well!" she went on. "You will be a regular Happy Family."

At half-past eight the general took his stand at the drawing-room door, surrounded by the ladies of his party, and assisted by Mrs. Percival, who had consented to lend her countenance to the affair, although, like Spriggy and Clip, she felt some misgivings as to its propriety. "I feel frightfully wicked to be dressing and dancing when poor Aunt Elizabeth may be dying," Miss Harcourt confessed, and Jim, surveying the festal appearance of the house, observed, with a significant whistle, "I hope I sha'n't be here when grandmother comes home." The other performers, peeping through

An American Night's Entertainment

the curtains, beheld Mrs. Acres distributing programmes with propitiatory smiles, and the general waving his guests with ceremony towards the camp-chairs provided for their accommodation. McCloskey, borrowed for the occasion, and acting as scene-shifter, pottered about in an aimless fashion, laboriously placing padded arm-chairs in the midst of the garden set, and mislaying properties until Percival became resigned and pensive. "Are you keeping my three dances for me, Spriggy?" he asked, plaintively, sitting on a sawhorse with a pair of curling-tongs in his hand. "I don't care in the least whether they are round or square, in the ballroom or the conservatory. All I ask is an opportunity of airing my grievances."

"I am going to dance, whether I can or not, for there may never be another ball in Fortmount-house," said Spriggy; "but I shall save my energies for the people who can't talk, and sit out my dances with those who can."

"I have a great deal to say," he assured her, "but it won't be amusing."

"I feel as though I were skipping over graves," said Bobby.

"And I am half dead with stage-fright," Clip confessed.

"You haven't lost your color," said Percival.

"That's rouge," she owned, a little ashamed.

"I thought so," said Percival.

"I know you don't like it, or—or anything to-night," she began. "If you think we are all horrid and heartless and ill-bred, why not say so at once?"

A Victim of Circumstances

"I hate that sort of thing on any one I care about," he admitted; "but, of course, I have no right to criticise, and I beg your pardon."

"Your wife, who loves you better than you love her, will have very few diversions, I'm afraid," said Clip, and turned away from him.

"You mustn't mind her," said Spriggy. "She is excited, and, I am afraid, a little unhappy."

"I shall be glad when Mrs. Trevor comes back," said Percival, placing a chair for her. "I suppose we can't induce Clip to sit down? She will tire herself to death."

The plays were greeted with that rapturous applause which crowns the efforts of the most hopeless amateurs, and Clip came off the stage to Percival, smiling over his flowers, and saying, "I am going now to have the man take this horrid stuff off my face."

When the general and Mrs. Acres appeared among their admirers, flushed, triumphant, and congratulating each other, the music struck up loudly, and Mr. Floyd opened the ball with Miss Fielding. The youth of Fortmounthouse, not being jaded by frequent opportunity, took the floor with enthusiasm, following the general's example, who still danced with the liveliest. At his own good time Roy sought out his fiancée, and asked her for a couple of waltzes. She was radiantly lovely in her new maturity, and not even the chilling fact of her engagement sufficed to lessen her success. She had been dancing steadily since the first lancers, and took her hand from Linnard's

An American Night's Entertainment

arm to answer her recreant lover. "I can't give you even one waltz, or anything else for that matter, at this late day. You should have spoken sooner," the newly fledged belle remarked with superb nonchalance. "I'm sorry, of course."

"I thought that, under the circumstances, you would keep a few dances for me. I believe it is customary," said Trevor.

"I am so ignorant about those things," she answered. "Still, I have no doubt Mr. Courtenay will spare one waltz if I ask him to excuse me."

"Then I conclude that he has several?" Trevor asked.

"All but two, which I promised Mr. Percival," said his fiancée, serenely.

"Isn't that rather pointed?"

"I don't know. I have had so little experience," said the young person. "I can only found myself on you. Ought you to keep Mr. Linnard waiting?"

"Suppose you consider me crushed, and tell me when to come for you," he suggested, with a suspicion of authority.

"Really, I don't know how to crawl out of a promise gracefully," she protested, "and my card is filled two-deep already." She turned again to the unconscious Linnard and signified her readiness to commence.

"I hope Courtenay dances well," said Trevor, and returned in a very bad humor to Mrs. Acres. It was plain that Clip's head was turned, but a little wholesome neglect would soon bring her to her senses. He therefore proceeded to whole-

A Victim of Circumstances

somely neglect her to the best of his abilities, and she was so unsatisfactory as to take no notice of it. Courtenay took her in to supper—such a banquet as had never before been served in Fortmounthouse. Bobby was radiantly gluttonous, and Percy Townshend, who had sat through the evening in stony disapproval, was heard to remark to Mrs. Floyd that Mrs. Guerrey's obituary would doubtless appear at the end of the column describing the festivities in the morning's paper. There were two reporters in the hall, but the general ignored their presence. "Such prodigality!" cried Mrs. Floyd, who had purchased a new dress for the occasion. "I can't but think that Mrs. Trevor will hold us all responsible when she comes back."

It was late when the supper was finished, and the small hours were waxing when the revellers departed. On the polished floor the general bravely pirouetted with partner after partner, ignoring the stiffness of his knees and the fatigue which would have overcome a less resolute person. Spriggy's ankle had grown painful, and she limped sadly, but there was no respite for her until four o'clock, when the Lynchesters and Morgans climbed into the wagonette, and the general, still erect and smiling, though his tightly shod feet were aching and his head was swimming, put Mrs. Percival into her carriage. Bobby, with a heated countenance, stood talking to the ladies of the house-party, whose torn gauzes bore witness to their popularity, and Courtenay and Clip were cooling themselves on the piazza, when Percival came out with a missing fan of his

An American Night's Entertainment

mother's. "Don't wait for me," he said. "I am going to walk."

"But, my dear boy, at this hour, and in thin shoes!" she protested.

"Don't make me confess that I ate too much terrapin," said her son, and kissed her good-night very conclusively. The musicians were packing their instruments when he went back, and Spriggy was in the hall, informing the satiated and somnolent McCloskey that he had better go home. Percival promptly disposed of the borrowed Irishman, found a cup of bouillon for Miss Harcourt, and stood by her while she drank it. "Well," he said, glancing down at her frayed skirts and the blue circles around her eyes, "has it paid?"

"I never had such a horrid time in my life!" she said, with a burst of almost hysterical frankness. "I feel wicked and—degraded! It isn't only what grandmamma will think of us—it's everything!"

"I don't see how you could have helped it," said Percival. "You and Clip were left in the general's charge. She must surely consider that."

"Oh, if that were all! I wish she would come to-morrow," said Spriggy. "Mrs. Acres and the girls are going away the day after to-morrow. They are all horrid except Maggie Fielding, and she is so changed! We are all changed. I never thought anybody would ever act so in this house. Uncle Edward is going himself on Thursday. I think he doesn't want to stay and face the music. Clip and I do that."

A Victim of Circumstances

"I am very glad he is going," said Percival. "He must be a rather exhausting visitor."

"Oh, but the worst is yet to come. On Wednesday night he is to give a farewell supper. They are all going to drive over to Saint Vincent's for luncheon, and Clip and I are to see that the table is properly decorated, and when they come back you are all coming over, and you don't know how hard he is to please. It is a men's affair, you know—just the people in the house, and you and Bobby and Mr. Townshend and Mr. Courtenay—but he is just as fussy about it as though you were all gourmands, and what do *I* know about the temperature of Burgundy?"

"I sha'n't criticise your catering," said Percival, "for I am quite sure that Percy won't come, and I can't very well leave him. I haven't been over-civil to him this summer."

"But, Sidney, you don't understand. I want you both to come. Please don't say that you won't. Oh, if grandmamma would only walk in to-morrow and stop it all! You have no idea how dreadful it all is, and how uncomfortable we are. If you and Mr. Townshend were only here, it might—oh, I don't know how to say it; I ought not to say it at all; but you know what I mean."

"Very well, I will make him come. Perhaps he may have the desired effect," said Percival.

"And you too," she added.

"I don't deserve it, but thank you for the compliment."

Spriggy's eyes turned involuntarily to where

An American Night's Entertainment

Trevor sat with Mrs. Acres. "There are so many things," she sighed, "and I can do so little to put them right. I suppose I am finely served for my conceit in thinking I could manage better than grandmamma."

"It is too much responsibility for you. Mrs. Trevor herself would be put to her trumps, I fancy," said her consoler.

"But when it comes to giving her the Wedgwood tea-set—great-aunt Van Doren's tea-set," poor Spriggy exclaimed hopelessly. "And they took a dozen forks on a picnic and forgot them in the woods, nobody knows where. They have shot holes through the carriage-house door, and they shut a goat in Miss Aldice's closet."

"They have a delicate sense of humor," said Percival, "which I fear your grandmother doesn't share. But it isn't your fault, and it won't last much longer." He took her cup, and bade her good-night, and walked home with plenty of food for reflection. As a matter of fact, he thought chiefly of the half-appealing, half-defiant look in Clip's eyes as she glanced back over her shoulder at him on her way to the stairs with Courtenay.

CHAPTER XXI

PLAIN LANGUAGE FROM MR. FLOYD

I HAVE come to eat up everything that is left from last night," Bobby announced, appearing at three o'clock in the midst of a jaded company which lounged on the piazza, yawned and regretted having risen at all. He visited the store-room, and brought his plates out with him, to the disgust of every one. "I'm sorry about the oysters, Spriggy," he said, "but they must be dead by this time, and a raw oyster isn't nice when it has died a natural death."

"Don't be unnecessarily nasty," Trevor admonished him. "The sight of the funeral-baked meats is unwelcome enough, and when you describe them in such peculiarly revolting terms, we are filled with an overpowering yearning to pitch you and your dishes over the cliff." He had boldly possessed himself of one of the ribbons which dangled from Mrs. Acres's belt, and was winding it around his fingers. "We are all in a bad humor, and we own it frankly. A little dissipation after so long a calm has demoralized us completely."

"I told you this morning that you needed a pick-me-up," said Mrs. Acres. "I always take one myself when I feel like this."

Plain Language from Mr. Floyd

"I have had six," said Trevor, "and each has made me feel uglier than the last."

"Ugly! You?" cried the lady, with a scream of laughter.

"I do not allude to my physical appearance, which would put a daisy to the blush," said Trevor. "Circumstances have made me but too well aware of my fatal beauty. My ugliness is spiritual, and takes the form of a violent desire to kill something."

"You may drown the new kittens," Jim suggested.

"Ugh, how can you?" cried the sensitive Mrs. Acres. "No, he wouldn't be satisfied with anything so harmless as kittens."

"He will take a man-eater," Trevor announced, "and lead her by her ribbon to the edge of the cliff—and there—we will draw a veil." He rose and pulled at the ribbon until its owner rose also and strolled with him away from the house.

"By the way," Mr. Floyd shouted after them, "I left McCloskey dead drunk, and tacking about in the labyrinth. He thinks he is hunting for mother. No doubt he's there yet, if you'd like to see him. I knew they would be making for it," he explained to Spriggy, "and Clip and her young man are probably there already. I don't mean *in* it, you know, for he really is there, but out by the hedge, and I know how they hate being disturbed."

It was then that Linnard followed up Mr. Floyd's speech with another equally unfortunate. "There is a sensible engaged couple for you! They are as matter-of-fact as though they were old married peo-

A Victim of Circumstances

ple. She goes her way, and he goes his, and there's no lovey-dovey business to make you wish you'd never been born."

"Well, I hate spoons and spasms, goodness knows," said Bobby, "but I should like to see a little more of 'em than I've noticed about here lately. Of course, it's a match of Madam Trevor's ordering, as we all know, but I shouldn't think either of 'em would fancy the way the other is going on, if only for the looks of things. Clip's a little flirt, and we all know what Roy is. First it's one, and then another, and I only hope I come in somewhere. It isn't every day you get a chance to let such a pretty girl wipe up the floor with you."

"How absurd you are," said Spriggy, indignantly. "You say the most impossible things of any one I know."

"They are true, though," he persisted. "It's as plain as the nose on your face. The old lady may order two people to marry each other, but she can't make them fall in love with each other."

"As though grandmamma were so ridiculous!" Spriggy exclaimed.

"Come, now, you're twice the girl that Clip is, yet if she were to order you to marry me to-morrow, you'd do it without a word," Mr. Floyd declared, bolting a pâté.

"I sha'n't alarm myself about that," said Spriggy, dryly.

"Come, let's bury the hatchet and take a walk," said Mr. Floyd, setting down his empty plate. "I can't hold any more at present, but there may be

Plain Language from Mr. Floyd

more vacancies later on. Come across the hedge and see McCloskey rolling about the labyrinth like one of those ivory balls in a Chinese puzzle. It's a choice sight, and one I wouldn't offer to show to everybody. Bless you, Spriggy, you're the girl for me. I always *did* like you the best of the bunch, and I'm not going to fight with you over a paltry thing like that. You needn't come, Jack. Go and chase Lacy."

Spriggy, deeming it advisable to remove Mr. Floyd from further temptation to gossip, walked slowly over the lawn with him, lending but a half-hearted attention while he argued and expostulated, exculpating himself from all intention of offence. Mrs. Acres and Trevor were not far ahead of them, making directly for the hedge. Bobby headed for a little clump of flowering azaleas and horse-chestnuts, where a rustic seat had been placed, contrary to the expressed orders of Madam Trevor. "That bench must go back to the carriage-house the moment the general leaves," Spriggy was thinking, when he grasped her arm, and half pulled her to a little opening in the shrubbery. "Sh!" he said. "Don't laugh, or give yourself away, but peep and see the fun."

Spriggy, expecting to behold her uncle in one of his attitudes, obediently followed his injunctions, but quickly drew back with an indignant face, and walked rapidly away. "I won't be an eaves-dropper," she said when they were out of earshot. "Aren't you ashamed, Bobby, bringing me here to spy on my cousin?"

A Victim of Circumstances

"She's poaching on your preserves," said Mr. Floyd, defiantly.

"She is at liberty to talk to whom she pleases, I hope," said Spriggy, hotly. "If Mr. Courtenay were anything to me, I should be glad to trust them together all the same."

"Now, Spriggy, don't try to fool me," said Mr. Floyd, earnestly. "You know that you are as good as engaged to that fellow, and you see that he is crazy about Clip. That may not be pleasant, but it's the plain truth. I never liked it anyhow, and there's nothing I wouldn't do to break it off."

"That is apparent," said Spriggy, angrily.

"It's for your own good, and you know it," he protested. "If I even thought that you loved him, I wouldn't say a word, though we none of us approve of it. He isn't fit to black your old shoes, and the country is full of men who would give their eyes for his chances. You see for yourself how he runs after Clip. You needn't think, either, that I'm just simply jealous, for it isn't that at all. You know that you could have had me any time these last three years, and I know that you won't. But when it comes to standing still and seeing you throw yourself away, whether it's my business or not, I won't do it, and if no one else speaks, I will."

"If she is careless, poor little thing, it is all Roy's fault," said Spriggy.

"Roy be hanged!" cried Mr. Floyd. "Let him go his own gait, and a good lively one it is too, if your grandmother does think him perfect. I could tell her things! Every man has some woman or

Plain Language from Mr. Floyd

other who thinks him perfect—every one but me, and I suppose I don't count. It's for you that I care."

"Don't waste any sympathy on me, Bobby," she answered. "I am not engaged to Mr. Courtenay, and never shall be."

"But you're fond of him—the beggar!" said Bobby, irately.

"I am fond of him, and he is fond of me, but not in the way you think," she answered, looking him squarely in the eyes. "He made a mistake in his own feelings at first, I think, but he must know better now."

"He wants to marry you, all the same," he declared.

"I should be sorry to think so, for he never will."

"Well, thank Heaven for that," Mr. Floyd ejaculated, piously. "I'm no dog in the manger. I don't object to other people's having a thing simply because I can't have it myself, but hang me if I didn't grudge that fellow his good luck."

"Go back and keep Roy away from the place. Mrs. Acres will be sure to go there," said Spriggy, turning to look towards the arbor. "Oh, Bobby, she is there already!"

"They will see no more than we did," said Mr. Floyd, encouragingly. "He just sits there making sheep's eyes at her, and talking about his tumble-down old hut in Ireland somewhere. Roy will see that he's not the only one who amuses himself."

"He has seen that already," said Spriggy. "Clip

A Victim of Circumstances

isn't to blame for this. She is as proud as Lucifer, and he is driving her to it."

"Serves him right, then," said Bobby. "See them looking in, the dunces! Much good may it do 'em. Oh, you're coming away, are you, you thundering old flirts! Before I'd peep, just because I saw somebody else do it."

"Idyllic, isn't it?" said Mrs. Acres, with an indulgent smile. "I was about to feel remorseful at having kept you away from her, but I see that mademoiselle consoles herself."

Trevor shrugged his shoulders and laughed. It was not altogether a pleasant laugh, however.

"I see you are disposed to be indulgent, and give as much liberty as you take," she went on. "So nice for her, but do you know, I shouldn't feel complimented at being left so free."

"Another of those terrible cases where I should flatter your self-respect at the expense of your vanity," said Trevor.

"If I had any self-respect, would I be walking with you now, while mademoiselle in the arbor is following in the footsteps of her papa, in desperation at your neglect? Ought I not to send you back to her? But I'm vain, and I can't."

"Yet they say women are not logical," said Trevor.

"Please don't call me 'women,'" said Mrs. Acres.

CHAPTER XXII

SHOWS THE DISASTROUS RESULTS OF FIRE- WORKS

THE general professed himself desolated at the departure of the ladies, but in reality the constant strain on his urbanity produced in him a weariness which rejoiced at their going. He, too, was aware of the slightness of the thread from which dangled the sword of retribution, and he made preparations for a trip to Lenox. The farewell supper once eaten, he proposed to flee the reckoning and shake the dust of Fortmounthouse from his feet. In the meantime the servants had given warning, and Courtenay arrived before the party had returned from Saint Vincent's.

The two girls had passed a trying day, in which emotional scenes with family servants had followed on the heels of captious criticism from the general, who found them completely lacking in the art of making a man feel comfortable in his own house. They had worked and shed tears over the pyramid of fruit and flowers in the centre of the table, and called in Mrs. Percival's aid regarding the temperature of the wines, and the time to allow the canvas-backs on the fire, and now, weary and

A Victim of Circumstances

nervous, they were condoling with each other in the hall, waiting for the sound of wheels, to superintend a few last details before betaking themselves to their own quarters and comparative peace.

Young Jim came in and cast himself upon the lounge. "Don't you want me to show you how to play cold hands?" he asked.

"What on earth is that?" Spriggy inquired.

"You'd better ask Courtenay," said the boy. "He and Roy were playing last night after you had gone to bed, and after I had watched for a few minutes I caught on."

"It must have been after your bedtime. I thought you were asleep," said his sister.

"I came down for a drink of water, and they let me stay," the boy explained. "Courtenay was losing like everything, too."

"You shouldn't tell things like that," said Clip.

"Well, he was. He says he has had the devil's own luck," Master Trevor announced. "Bobby thinks so too, but *he* seems to get more money, and I guess Courtenay can't. Bobby says it's his own fault—that he will insist on playing. He says Roy doesn't want to win all the time, but the luck runs that way; and you can't refuse to play with a man who has lost more to you than he can afford."

"I wouldn't repeat such things if I were you," said Spriggy. "Men don't tell, I'm sure."

"Bobby does," said Jim.

"Don't you think he had better have his supper now, Spriggy?" Clip asked. "It will be so late when we have ours. And if you'll only go to bed at eight

The Disastrous Results of Fireworks

o'clock, you can eat all the plum-cake you want. It didn't kill you before, and I don't believe it will again."

As the youth departed for the kitchen to order his indigestible repast his sister and his cousin exchanged mournful glances. "I'm afraid it's true," said Spriggy.

"Of course it is," said Clip, "and Roy doesn't seem to care in the least. I spoke to him about it myself. The fact is, Bobby told me to—not that I pay much attention to what he says as a rule, but he seemed so much in earnest that I was quite worried. It is perfectly scandalous in them all, and if grand-mamma knew it—"

"I wish she did," said Spriggy. "There is one thing I sha'n't leave her to discover. I hate to do it now, too, when he seems to be in trouble, but I have made up my mind to do it to-day, and if I put it off again I know I shall never do it. And I must do it."

"You mean—Mr. Courtenay?" Clip asked.

"Yes; I have been sure of it ever since the ball, but I simply hadn't the courage to tell him, he seemed so depressed. I don't know what has made me such a coward. Not that I think he will care as much as he would have cared two months ago," said Spriggy, frankly. "He is very much changed, and not for the better. Of course it won't be pleasant at any time."

"Here he comes now. Wait until to-morrow, and write to him," said Clip.

"I wish I might," said Spriggy.

Courtenay came in rather sullenly. He was

A Victim of Circumstances

unhappy and worried, and he showed it only too plainly. "I'm too early, I see," he said. "I always manage to do the wrong thing somehow. I'll go out and take a look at the kennels."

"It is papa who is late," said Clip. "We expect him at any moment now. Does your head ache? Don't you want some of grandmamma's drops? They did Bobby so much good. I'll go and get them." She left the room, not sorry for an excuse to get away, and Courtenay flung himself into an arm-chair.

"You do look badly," said Spriggy, forgetting her resolution at sight of the black circles around his eyes, and his heavy expression. "I hope you are not going to be ill again."

"There's nothing the matter with me. It's my affairs and not my health, that need doctoring," he answered.

"I hope you've had no bad news from home," she said, with the ready sympathy which he had always found so grateful, and on which he had grown to depend.

"No more than usual. It's always bad news from home. When you come to Thorpe," he assured her, with miserable levity, "you'll find no tiles on the roofs and no glass in the windows. Our tenants won't pay, poor devils, and couldn't if they would. There's nothing coming to me, I've managed badly, and I'm swimming beyond my depth when I stay here."

"I wonder if you would mind," Spriggy began timidly, "if I were to treat you just as I would Jim

The Disastrous Results of Fireworks

or—or Bobby? It seems so absurd that a woman can't do as she likes in those things, and I should be so glad. You know I have been a sort of a sister to you, and it is all in the family."

"Don't, Spriggy! I can't stand it," said Courtenay. "If you are going to marry me, that's one thing, but as for this sister business—how could I?"

"I don't see what difference it makes," she protested. "Men have such ridiculous notions about money! If I were a man, you wouldn't be so foolish. And really, I've hardly spent a *sou* all summer. The next time I'm feeling poor I promise solemnly to borrow of you."

"I own," said Courtenay, "that if it was known that you were going to marry me it would make an enormous difference in my prospects. But don't you see that, while I thank you with all my heart, I couldn't accept such a favor from any woman but my wife?"

"No, and I never shall see," she persisted. "It seems to me a very stupid way of managing things that one friend may have more than plenty, and another not enough, and simply because one happens to be a man and the other a woman everything must go on being as unequal and unjust as ever."

"There's a way out of it," said Courtenay, "and that's unequal, too."

"Not if they love each other," said Spriggy. "Oh, Reggy, I wish I loved you. I wish I could. I am so sorry and ashamed that I ever let you think I might."

"Don't tell me now," said Courtenay. "For God's sake, don't tell me to-night."

A Victim of Circumstances

"But what good will it do to wait? I must tell you sooner or later. It ought to have been sooner," said Spriggy, with tears in her voice, "but I couldn't bear to do it. Of course, I know that you don't really care as much as you might if—if I were a different sort of a girl, but I know you were fond of me in a way, just as I'm fond of you, and I wish with all my heart that I had never let matters go on in this way."

"If it's only because you have an idea I don't love you enough—" Courtenay began.

"That is not the only consideration," said Spriggy. "You could love some one else better—much better—and so could I."

"Perhaps you think I do already," Courtenay suggested, with growing anger. "It may have been suggested to you."

"I haven't spoken a word to any one except Clip. How could you imagine it?" she asked, indignant in her turn, but filled with regret and pity at sight of his resentful misery. "We have both come near to making a very serious mistake, and we ought to be glad that we discovered it before it was too late."

"Do you mean that this is the end?" he asked.

"Oh, I hope not the end of our friendship. Only of this miserable false position, which is more my fault than yours," said Spriggy. "I can't bear to lose any one I care about. Can't you see yourself, Reggy, that we shouldn't be happy?"

Courtenay glowered from the fireplace. "I'm glad you don't love me. It makes me seem less of a brute. You have always been awfully good to me

The Disastrous Results of Fireworks

until now, and this business isn't your doing. I don't blame *you* for it. I know well enough who is responsible. All the same, this has done the business for me. It was just a toss-up when I came here this evening whether I was to go to the devil or not, and the devil has come out ahead."

"Oh, don't say that!" cried Spriggy, in great distress. "It would simply break my heart if I thought you meant it." She plead and exhorted with the zeal of a guilty conscience until the cook came to the door, beckoning and threatening the ruin of the ducks, and she was glad to flee even to the insurrection of the pantry, to escape his haggard looks.

Clip came back while his wrath and despair were still strong upon him, and he spoke to her rudely. "You will be glad to hear that Miss Harcourt has broken with me."

"Glad?" said Clip.

"You needn't pretend to be surprised," he assured her. "I know it was your doing."

"Don't you think you are a little unjust?" she asked. "I am not responsible for it. I'm truly awfully sorry that it had to happen."

"I see no necessity for its happening, if it had not been for you," he answered. "You always did your best to break it off. I should have made her a good husband."

"I never thought so," said Clip.

"And if I hadn't, whose fault would it have been?" he demanded. "Why couldn't you leave well enough alone? You knew the truth. You knew I needed

A Victim of Circumstances

the money, so you set me down as a fortune-hunter. Can't you conceive of a man's marrying a rich wife and treating her well? I assure you, I hesitated long enough before I spoke, because I had some pride left, if I *am* an adventurer. And then you drove me to it."

Clip surveyed him with a superb scorn. "*I drove you to it?*"

"God knows I needed the money," he went on, "but I liked her—I was fond of her—I could have loved her, if I had never seen you."

"I am glad you will own the truth at last," said Clip, in a burst of passion, "though indeed I always felt it. You would have been so contemptible as to marry a girl like Spriggy for her money—a girl whom most men would be only too thankful to love without a penny! If I really have broken it off, I am glad—do you hear?—glad!"

"Well, you've done it," he repeated, doggedly. "You knew you could. It's a very simple matter for you to make a man fall in love with you. I don't see what right you have to criticise me, though. It wasn't until you decided to marry Roy for his money that I tried to marry her for hers."

The sound of wheels grated on the gravel outside, but he did not heed it. He advanced towards her with a white face. "What are you going to give me to pay for it?" he asked. "You have lost me everything. I'm a ruined man. I shall have to go away. I can never see you again, but before I go you shall pay me a little of what you have cost me." She stood beside the table, flashing defiant lightnings from

The Disastrous Results of Fireworks

her great eyes. She was badly frightened, but she would not show it, or retreat an inch before his steady advance. She had imbibed her grandmother's theory that dignity is an absolute protection to its possessor, and she held her little head high and confidently, poor child. In another moment he had her in his arms and was kissing her, fiercely and passionately. It all took place in an instant. In the next, while he still held her, Trevor crossed the threshold. The others were still outside. There was no time to lose. He snatched Clip, half dazed, from Courtenay's arms, and carried her to the foot of the stairs. "Go to Spriggy," he said, brusquely, and General Trevor entered the hall, the rest trooping in at his heels.

"How are you, Reggy?" said the general, blandly. "Sorry to be so late. We got off the road, between the hotel and the falls. We won't stop for elaborate toilets. No prinking, boys. Bobby will entertain you, Reggy, until we come down."

Trevor went past his cousin without a word. There could be no disturbance until after supper. Percival and Percy Townshend arrived in the meantime, and he found them in the hall when he came down. They went in to supper, Trevor grimly expectant, Courtenay on the defensive, the others in blissful unconsciousness that the little grievances and ill blood which for a long time had been growing between the two cousins were at length brought to the light of publicity. Percy had come reluctantly, and felt out of place, but Mr. Lacy showed himself cheertul for the first time, and Bobby was radiant. Percival

A Victim of Circumstances

was bored, for the supper, though hilarious, was like so many other suppers, where exhilaration passes for wit, and the most threadbare jests are as good as new. The general's party were in high spirits. They had been drinking joyfully all day, and still the diversion had not palled upon them. The famous story of the battle of Saddler's Creek was greeted with great applause, as were Mr. Floyd's sallies. Poor Percy fidgeted in his chair, and cast anxious glances at Percival, who joined little in the conversation, but emptied his glass as regularly as the others. The talk turned from shooting Indians to shooting at a mark, and the general hazarded the assumption that there was not a man in the room who could snuff a candle at fifty paces. Trevor pushed back his chair and walked towards the door.

"Where are you going?" his uncle inquired.

"To get the pistols," he answered, and left the room.

"I may not be able to shoot straight," said Kearney, "but I can put out five out of six candles with a five-cent piece, standing ten feet away."

There were four heavily branched silver candlesticks on the table. Courtenay placed one of these on the floor. The wax dripped onto Trevor's shoulder as he did so.

"Infernal awkwardness!" said Trevor.

"It's fully ten feet from here to the bow-window," said Kearney. "When I've put out these other lights we can play 'Fireworks' until Roy brings the pistols."

The experiment having been successfully per-

The Disastrous Results of Fireworks

formed, Bobby offered to catch silver dollars in his mouth at any distance, but this offer being disregarded, the company settled down to the intellectual pastime of "Fireworks," the general joining in the game with increased grandeur of bearing. Percy tried not to show his scorn, until on Trevor's arrival with the pistols the general proceeded to give examples of his prowess as a marksman.

"That's a pretty revolver of yours," said Courtenay.

"It's one of Roy's," the general answered.

"I might have known it," said Courtenay. "Everything seems to belong to him."

"That's a matter of opinion," said Trevor, and caught Percival's eye fixed questioningly upon him.

"Stand aside, gentlemen. I don't wish to hurt any one," said the general, warningly, preparing to discharge his second pistol at the smoking candles on the floor.

"What's the matter with Courtenay?" Percival asked in a quick aside.

Trevor played with his wineglass. "I came home suddenly, and had the pleasure of finding Clip in his arms."

"Nonsense!" said Percival.

"Am I not to believe my own eyes? Most people lie, certainly," said Trevor. "She doesn't. She informed me frankly that she was marrying me for my money. I'm not drunk, Sid. I want you to see me through."

"It's his fault, of course," said Percival.

A Victim of Circumstances

"I hold him responsible for it. When I have settled with him I can attend to the rest of it," said Trevor. The general's second shot rang out. The room was full of smoke and the smell of powder. Some one opened another window. It was bright starlight.

"Don't be an idiot," said Percival, succinctly. "If he has insulted her—"

"I'm bound to consider it an insult," said Trevor, in a peculiar tone. "As a matter of fact, I don't suppose he is entirely to blame. I shall have to settle with him first, of course."

"And after that," said Percival, quietly, "if you are not satisfied, you may settle with me."

"Sidney, you're crazy!" said his friend, incredulously. "Don't deceive yourself as I did. The game isn't worth the candle."

"I meant what I said," Percival observed, in the same quiet voice, pouring himself another glass of the magnate's excellent Burgundy. "That will do for the present. In the meantime, if you need me, I am at your service, but not for any absurdity, and not here."

Kearney's voice rose above the *mêlée*. "Yes, I have eaten moderately, and sinned often, and I wish to heaven my stomach troubled me as little as my conscience."

Linnard pressed up to the table and took a glass at hap-hazard. "Here's to the girls we leave behind us," he cried with enthusiasm. Courtenay followed him. He walked unsteadily, and his eyes looked bloodshot. "Can't you think of

The Disastrous Results of Fireworks

something more cheerful than that?" he demanded.

"It's close in here," said Trevor. "Come outside for a little air. Sidney, will you be kind enough to give my cousin your arm?"

"I have no need of it," said Courtenay, brusquely.

"Grateful creature!" said Trevor. They had reached the door which opened onto the terrace, where Percy was already taking the air. Trevor was ahead, and Courtenay followed him closely.

"You can't have a row here," said Percival, laying a detaining hand on his friend's arm.

"Oh, no," said Trevor, quite audibly. "I only want to tell him that I shall take great pleasure in thrashing him when he's sober."

"Two to one?" Courtenay inquired. "Well, it won't be the first time. Oh, you've been civil to me. Don't throw it in my teeth. It was only to show me that you had the advantage from the start. As for the money I owe you—"

"Damn the money!" said Trevor. "You know what I'm talking about."

Courtenay turned back to the house, going straight to the table around which the others were standing. He came back again with one of the pistols. "Don't fool with that. There's a charge left in it," said Percy, warningly, and Percival stood ready to knock the weapon out of his hand should he attempt to use it. Trevor stood on the terrace with his hands behind him, laughing unpleasantly. "Leave him alone. He can't touch me," he said, "and I won't touch him—to-night."

A Victim of Circumstances

"Give me fair play," said Courtenay. "Perhaps I'm drunk. Perhaps I'm sober. Here's your pistol, Trevor. Shoot me if you like."

"With your permission, I will thrash you to-morrow instead," said Trevor.

"Then take it now!" said Courtenay, and raised his arm. He had no time to take aim. There was a flash and a report, and Percival knocked the pistol from his hand a moment too late.

"What are you fellows doing?" Linnard called out. Trevor walked a few steps towards the house, and fell full length on the turf before any one could reach him. Percival went to him and raised his head. Some one came out of the door, and presently Bobby followed, with confused ejaculations, bringing one of the candlesticks. "You've done it this time," said Percival, grimly.

Courtenay picked the still smoking revolver from the grass, and examined it critically, and for a moment no one spoke. Percy was the first to break the silence. "Put that down," he said, sharply. "You have done enough mischief with it already." As they stood around the fallen man, shocked into sobriety, the general came heavily to the door.

CHAPTER XXIII

MISS TREVOR GAINS HER POINT

"**H**ERE'S a pretty piece of business. What's to be done?" said Linnard. "If it's an accident—"

"In my house, sir, it can be nothing else," said the general. "Shot, eh? Who did it?"

No one spoke. Courtenay seemed dazed and stupefied. Percival was supporting his friend's head on his knee. "Can't you bring the candles, Bobby?" he asked.

The candlestick was planted on the grass close by, and the general, approaching, bent over the prostrate man, and ran his hand tentatively along his low-cut waistcoat, down which a little stream of blood was trickling. "Who did it?" he asked again. "It's a damned stupid piece of business, whoever it was."

"It's my doing," said Courtenay, in a thick voice.

"He didn't aim. It can't be called intentional," said Percy, hastily.

"Naturally it can't. I'll have no scandal. Please bear witness, gentlemen, that it is a most unfortunate accident," said the general, "but all the same, I believe you've killed your man."

A Victim of Circumstances

"No, no, don't jump to conclusions, general," said Kearney. "It's a bad business, of course, but he's not dead."

The general was bitterly incensed. "Which of us has seen the most men killed, you or I?" he roared. "Hold up the candle again, Bobby. It's in the lungs—kills in ten minutes."

"Get me some brandy, some one," said Percival, "and go for a doctor."

"Doctor? Coroner!" said the general. "Well, young man, I hope you're done with fire-arms for the present. I should say your best plan was to get out of this part of the country as soon as possible."

Courtenay had gone after brandy. He seemed hardly to realize the extent of his misfortune. He helped Percival to force the glass between his cousin's lips, while Percy offered to go for the doctor. "The brown mare is fresh. *You* can't ride her. Have Ira put her into the buggy," said the general. "I tell you, Sidney, you're wasting your trouble. Why don't you send for a sponge, and keep the blood off your clothes? Bobby, go find a sponge. There are plenty up-stairs."

Bobby went rushing to Madam Trevor's room, where the girls were sitting in their wrappers, waiting to put away the silver. "Give me a sponge!" he cried. "Roy's killed!"

Spriggy sprang to her feet, but Clip sat motionless and rigid. "Hurry! Hurry!" he urged. "I tell you, Courtenay shot him!"

Clip rose, went into the next room, and returned

Miss Trevor Gains Her Point

with sponge and towels. Spriggy catechised the excited messenger.

"Percy's going for the doctor, and he can't drive a cow," he went on, wildly. "They won't let *me* go. It's the brown horse, and Percy doesn't know the road."

"I'll go myself," said Spriggy. "I'll harness the horse."

They had carried Trevor inside and laid him on madam's best damask sofa, the general tottering after them with fast stiffening knees, and it was Miss Harcourt herself who brought the brown mare to the door, and drew up for Percy to get in. "Tell me how it happened," she said, as they turned the oval. "Did they quarrel?"

"I don't know anything about it," said poor Percy. "There was apparently no cause for the trouble. I don't understand it in the least."

"Did he mean to do it? Oh, I'm afraid it was my fault," said Spriggy, wringing her hands with the reins in them. The brown mare shied at the shadows which the lantern cast, and the air was shrill with crickets. Percy was very uncomfortable, and much distressed. In his lectures and warnings he had frequently predicted some such catastrophe as this as the outcome of all the recklessness, the gambling, flirting, and drinking which the general had brought in his train, but the reality had proved much worse than his most fervid prophecies. The quarrel was incomprehensible to him, but he felt guilty at playing the part of a bystander. "I thought," Spriggy went on, "that you and Sidney wouldn't let anything happen."

A Victim of Circumstances

"Sidney tried to stop it. I don't think Courtenay meant to do it. It is simply a horrible nightmare to me," Percy said. He had no desire to vindicate his reputation as an amateur prophet. He was only grief-stricken at the fate which had overtaken the friend whom he had loved, and admired, and preached at for years. "Sha'n't I take you to the Floyds'?" he asked. "I would go back and get Miss Trevor. I don't think you ought to stay—there."

"Grandmamma left me in charge," said Spriggy, "and though I have been so unsuccessful in managing so far, I feel that I must stay until she comes home. Besides, who is to take care of Roy?"

Percy shook his head mournfully. It was his private opinion that Trevor would need little more care.

"I trust," said Spriggy, with sudden violence, "that the general will never come home again." Percy's heart echoed her sentiments, but he said nothing. In her disgust at the folly and lawlessness of the past few weeks his respectability seemed a shield and a refuge to her outraged spirit. She wondered that she could ever have made sport of him.

When they returned with the doctor, they found the general seated at a table, still giving his orders, which Percival heard without heeding. Trevor had had a faint flickering of consciousness, and a discouraging return to the stupor which had first overcome him. Though Bobby bustled about with towels and brandy, a mournful helplessness

Miss Trevor Gains Her Point

and inefficiency seemed to have taken possession of every one. Nobody appeared to have any hope but Percival, who knelt beside the sofa, trying to stanch the flow of blood, and to force stimulants down his friend's throat. In the room across the hall sat Courtenay, half in darkness, with his head in his hands.

The gloom deepened as the doctor entered, and Bobby's face worked as they wheeled the sofa under the chandelier. After a while the general and his friends came out and tiptoed up-stairs. The two girls heard them creaking past the door of the room where they waited for news. "I am sure I could do something. Don't you think they need me?" the executive Spriggy inquired, longing for occupation in the midst of her grief. "Mr. Townshend promised to let me know at once, but he has forgotten."

"I am going down-stairs now," said Clip.

Spriggy followed her, expostulating. "Don't, dear! It's no place for you. It will make you faint. Let me tell you about it." But Miss Trevor set her little white lips, and passed on resolutely towards the parlor. Percival was just coming out. His mouth was set, too, and there were splashes of red on his white shirt-front. He barred the door with his arm, seeing Clip there, and said hastily to Spriggy, "Take her away."

"It is my place," said Clip.

"Percy has just gone to telegraph for a specialist and a nurse. He's still unconscious. He won't know whether you are there or not," said Per-

A Victim of Circumstances

cival. "If he asks for you, I will let you know at once."

"I am sure I could help," said Spriggy. "You were coming out for some one."

"Only for a breath of air. I can do everything that is necessary until the nurse comes. Percy is going to bring my mother back with him," said Percival. "Go up-stairs again and rest until she comes."

"You don't understand. I must see him," said Clip. "How is he to know the truth? Do people know the truth when they are dead?"

"I do understand, and I will call you the moment he asks for you."

"He won't ask for me," said Clip.

"I'm so glad your mother is coming," said Spriggy. "You think of everything, Sidney. I'm so thankful that you were here."

"I deserve no thanks," said Percival, sadly. "If I had not been a clumsy idiot, this would never have happened. I don't know why I wasn't quicker. Don't let me keep you standing here."

"Come, Clip," said Spriggy, and tried once more to draw her cousin away. It needed all her love for the girl to overcome the bitterness that had sprung up in her heart. It was Clip of whom Percival had thought the first—Clip whom he was anxious to spare—and yet Clip, after all, was the most to be pitied. They all knew that the quarrel had been for her.

"If you were in my place," said Clip, "if you knew that he might never speak to you again, and that he

Miss Trevor Gains Her Point

believed it was your fault, could you stay outside, and let him die there alone? Sidney, let me go to him. I belong there now, at least, and if afterwards—" She never finished her foreboding. Percival stood aside, very reluctantly, and allowed her to pass in. He saw her kneel beside the sofa, and after a while he led her out of the room. She went quite meekly, and with dry eyes. Spriggy, who longed to pet and comfort her, hardly dared to speak to her. There was a little stir at Mrs. Percival's arrival, and then the stillness and watching recommenced.

Percy went in search of Courtenay, and found the young man sleeping heavily. He mercifully refrained from waking him, but he felt little sympathy with any one who could find even temporary oblivion under such circumstances. He had commissioned himself with the task of averting scandal from the family, and in common humanity he was bound to get Courtenay out of the neighborhood, but it was duty, and not sympathy, which inspired the forbearance he exhibited towards the culprit.

At daybreak Trevor was conscious, but unable to speak, and Percy went once more to the library, where he found Courtenay awake. "I am just setting off for the village," he said, "and if I can be of any service to you, don't hesitate to tell me. The general seems to think that it would be better for you to be away from Fortmounthouse just at present."

"Where shall I go?" asked Courtenay. He spoke hopelessly and helplessly.

A Victim of Circumstances

"I don't know," said Percy, confused at this sudden question. "There are a great many places. If you should wish to take that early train—it might be pleasanter for you—you can leave everything to me—everything. I will see about your luggage, and your bills, and all that, and—"

"But I'm not going to run away," Courtenay broke in. "I'm going to stay here until they know the worst, and then take the consequences."

"But that is the last thing we want you to do," Percy protested. "Still, if you would like to hear what Dr. Van Horn says when he comes, of course I can't prevent your staying." He went away, shaking his head. Courtenay was incomprehensible to him. "You had better see him," he said to Percival. "He may be willing to listen to reason from you." So Percival went.

"Is he dead?" Courtenay asked, as he entered the room.

"No," said Percival, and sat down on the opposite side of the table. "Graham doesn't consider it absolutely hopeless."

"I suppose you've come to tell me that I had better go?" Courtenay observed. "But I can't go until I've had a chance to explain how it happened. I don't mean last night, but—before."

"You want to tell *me*?"

"I don't know any one better," said Courtenay. "You can tell him, you know. He wouldn't listen to me, but I want him to know that it was all my fault. I have no excuse to offer. I think the devil was in me. Why didn't you stop me?"

Miss Trevor Gains Her Point

"God forgive me that I didn't," said Percival.

"I needn't tell you," Courtenay went on, "that I owe him a lot of money. He said he didn't care about it, and it wasn't his way to notice little things. Besides, he couldn't very well refuse to play when he had been winning, and it was I who wanted a chance to win back. So I insisted on playing. And I've been generally going to the dogs all summer. It's just as Bobby said—I don't trot in your class. I was broke to start with. And then—the other thing."

"You might find it easier to write it," said Percival.

"No, I'll tell it, now I'm started. I'm not trying to excuse myself, Percival, but he didn't care. You know how he acted to me, and to *her*. So I thought it made no difference. It wasn't her fault, but if I had never seen her—" He broke down miserably, and buried his face in his hands. "You know it was because I loved her."

"Do you blame any one but yourself?" Percival asked, sternly.

"No. I had no right to think so. You know what I did?"

"I understand that you took advantage of an innocent girl to whom you owed the greatest possible respect. You admit that it was inexcusable, and you offer your humblest apologies. There is no more to be said on the subject."

"Yes, that's what I want to say. But I didn't think you'd hit a man when he's down. It seems to me you're pretty hard, Percival. My quarrel wasn't with you."

A Victim of Circumstances

"Yes, I know I'm hard, and I'm sorry for it," said Percival. "I can't help it, though. Well—you want me to tell him what you have said, if I have the chance?"

"Yes," said Courtenay.

The report spread quickly through the village, so that when the specialist arrived from New York early in the morning there was a little crowd at the station to question poor Percy, and increase his mortification at being remotely concerned in so black an affair. This feeling yielded again to anxiety as they all sat in the hall awaiting the outcome of the consultation. The general had appeared, faultlessly attired, but showing the traces of last night's fatigue. From time to time he passed his handkerchief across his dull eyes, for he was an emotional man. Bobby lounged in an easy-chair, but Percy sat bolt-upright. No weariness would have induced him to loll in the presence of ladies. The two girls were still up-stairs, but Mrs. Floyd was crying on Mrs. Percival's shoulder. She had come without a summons as soon as the milkman brought the news.

"In any event," said the general, "I propose leaving by the noon train. I feel that it is best for all of us. Well, well, so it is in this life. As Shakespeare puts it, 'Two women shall be grinding at a mill, and one shall be taken and the other left.'"

"I think it's the Bible," said Percy, correctively.

"Whoever was responsible for the sentiment," the general pursued, loftily, "there are plenty who could be better spared."

Miss Trevor Gains Her Point

"But, good Lord, he isn't dead yet!" cried Bobby, explosively. "Damn it, why couldn't it have been me?—a fellow on an allowance, by Jove, and not engaged to anybody!"

"His feelings run away with him," Percy apologized to the company.

"Hold your tongue!" snapped Mr. Floyd, and relapsed into silence.

When the result of the consultation was made known, Percival went to the library once more to acquaint Courtenay with the news, and found him pacing the floor with the restlessness of a caged wild beast. "Well?" he said, hoarsely. He had evidently nerved himself to hear the worst.

"They have taken the ball out. He stands a good chance of recovery," said Percival.

"Then I will go," said Courtenay. It was all he could force himself to say until Percival turned to leave the room, when he faltered out, "I suppose there's no chance—of my seeing her again?"

"I should say not," said Percival, with an ugly twitch of his mouth. His patience was at an end. He sent Percy in, who fussed anxiously over the culprit, urging him to eat, to put on an overcoat, to accept a loan—above all, not to give way. Percy's ideas of giving way were chaotic but dreadful. Courtenay declined all but the overcoat. His knees shook under him like a sick man's. The smallest details of the familiar room impressed him afresh and clung to his memory afterwards—the rows of books in their dark bindings, the worn leather chairs, the queer Dutch flower-pieces on the

A Victim of Circumstances

walls. It was hard to realize the difference between to-day and yesterday. As he stood, still hesitating to take the first step away from the stage on which his sorry little tragedy had been played to a close, he heard the door behind him opened softly, and Clip came into the room. That his presence was an unwelcome surprise to her she soon made manifest by her shrinking and horror. She was turning from him without a word when he cut off her retreat with a despairing cry of, "It was all for you!"

She swept by him with the cruelest scorn and aversion, motioning him to stand out of her path.

"I thought you loved me," he persisted, desperately.

"*You?*" she said.

"Oh, I know now," he went on. "But at least I thought you might pity me. I am going at once, and you will be rid of me forever. But won't you say you forgive me? Must I remember you—like this?"

"I *can't* forgive you," she answered, and turned from him to the window, looking out with dry eyes upon the river and the yellow sunshine. He waited for a sign of relenting, but Miss Trevor could be hard as well as another, and, after all, he had done her a bitter injury. So, with no word of comfort, he staggered out through the hall, not knowing how he made his farewells, and so on to the village. When he had gone, Percival went back to the library.

She was waiting for him. "I wouldn't ask any one," she said. "I thought that, whatever it was, I could bear it better from you."

Miss Trevor Gains Her Point

"It is good news," said Percival. "His constitution is in his favor, and he has every chance of recovery."

She flung herself into a big carved chair, where she curled into a little heap and cried as if her heart would break. He made no attempt to stop her, though every impulse cried out to him to take her into his arms and soothe her like a child. The best that was in him yearned over her, idealizing her very faults, knowing the worst of her, and finding it worthy of all love and sympathy. Finally she sat up and dried her eyes. "You are so patient with me!" she sighed. "Has he asked for me yet?"

"He has not spoken," Percival assured her, knowing better than any one the obstinacy that might be behind that silence. "It is better that he shouldn't. Now, you must try to eat something, or you will be ill yourself. Stay here and let me order some breakfast for you."

"I know they have coffee in the hall," said Clip, plaintively, "but I don't want it." She had been quiet and dignified all night; now she looked up at him with the air of a spoiled child, pushing the little rings of hair back from her forehead with an impatient gesture.

"Let me make you some tea then," said Percival. "I can, really. I can light the fire here and make it on the grate."

"Have you had any breakfast yourself? No, I know you haven't. I am a selfish thing, and forget everybody else," she declared, remorsefully. "We will have breakfast together. Poor Sidney!

A Victim of Circumstances

You look so tired. Mind, I won't eat a thing unless you do, and we will have it in here, for I will not go into the hall again while all those people are there."

He lighted the fire, and went in search of the demoralized servants, who were everywhere but where they belonged. She took advantage of his absence to rearrange her hair. He found her on his return seated before the grate with her hands outstretched to the blaze. "I'm afraid you won't like your breakfast," he said, "but the cook is so busy crossing herself that she hasn't time to keep things from burning. I found something that looks like boned turkey in the refrigerator, and if you will promise not to laugh at me, I will make you some better toast than this."

"I don't feel in the least like laughing," she assured him.

"You feel better, though, for you have been prinking in my absence," he said, "which, by the way, I consider a high compliment. How it is possible to make an elaborate coiffure without the aid of a hand-glass, I can't pretend to say, but—"

"What do you know about hand-glasses?" she interrupted, with more animation.

"Only this," said Percival, gravely, "that if mother were wrecked on a desert island, the one possession to which she would cling would be that mirror."

"The back of my hair takes care of itself," said Clip.

Miss Trevor Gains Her Point

"It is a triumph of independence," he observed. "Shall I give the omelette to the cat, to save the cook's feelings?"

"Oh, Moses, what would grandmamma say if she saw you eating on the carpet?" sighed Clip, stroking the old cat's wicked, sleek head.

"For that matter, what would she say if she saw *me* here?" Percival speculated. "Evening clothes at eleven in the morning—"

"A wrapper, and Turkish slippers—" she interpolated.

"But she doesn't see us, and here is your toast. I will confess all when she comes home, and in the meantime you will eat it *all* with a grateful heart and a polite assumption of relish."

"I certainly have the grateful heart," said Clip, looking at him with soft eyes. "Now come and eat your breakfast, for you need it much more than I do. How do you take your tea?"

"Just the way you take yours," he said, mendaciously. "Look at this bold beast choking over a truffle. It serves you right, old man. You know you stole it."

"Pat his back, or he will strangle. He's often taken that way," said Clip. "Here is your tea, but I'm afraid you will find it dreadfully sweet."

"Does he always scratch like this?" Percival inquired, pensively, exhibiting his hand.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I ought to have done it myself."

"Would you have let me 'kiss the place and make it well'?"

A Victim of Circumstances

"There would have been no place. He is never cross to me."

"I am, though," he assured her, "when you don't eat anything."

"People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. How much are you eating yourself?"

"I have telegraphed for your grandmother," said Percival, severely.

"Not really? What will she—? Well, I'm glad."

"I hope she won't regard it as an insolent practical joke. One can't always tell how a thing is going to strike her. I said something like this: 'Can you return at once? I think you would prefer to be here. Roy is ill.' I hardly dared be more explicit after the general's cautions about keeping the matter quiet."

"I am sure that was a very good way of putting it. She will never go away again, and I wouldn't, in her place. A little fresh tea?"

"Not quite so sweet this time."

"They have forgotten the sugar-tongs, so I must use my fingers. How many will you have?"

"All ten, if you please," said Percival.

"How *can* you joke?"

"I do it with difficulty, I admit," he said, sadly.

She had left the table and gone back to her arm-chair. A flush was deepening over her face. "Perhaps," she said, "you are like all the rest. You believe that it was my fault last night."

He came and knelt beside the chair. "I know you better than that," he said. "You have always my sincerest trust—and reverence."

Miss Trevor Gains Her Point

"I thank you with all my heart," said Clip. She gave him her little hand and he raised it to his lips. If he could tear his hopes out of his heart, his ideals were more firmly rooted, and, rightly or wrongly, they were embodied in this one young, slender creature who was not for him. He went away the next moment, and returned to his watch with Trevor. Bobby was in the room.

"He's trying to speak," the lively gentleman cried. "Listen to what he's saying."

Trevor's eyes were open, and wandering about the room. His first remark was neither pious nor picturesque. "I won't have that old crocodile in here again."

"The general? He's gone! He's gone!" Bobby protested wildly, and burst out crying.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE RESTORATION

OF the return of the magnate, of the discoveries attendant thereon, and of the condign punishment swiftly meted out to the offenders, so much has been said in Fortmounthouse, both authentic and imaginary, that it is unnecessary to chronicle it further in these pages. The chief culprit took his stripes in epistolary form, having wisely chosen to absent himself from his native heath until the old order should be established, and no need remained to make an example of insurgents. Trevor was too ill to be treated with more than an impartial firmness, but Clip's nervous chills were promptly dealt with, and Miss Harcourt, the executive, was forced to accompany her grandmother during the dreadful inventory of broken glass, stained linen, missing silver—all the visible tokens of interregnum. She was forced, also, to tell what she knew about the quarrel, and as the story was dragged forth bit by bit under the shrewd old lady's ruthless questioning, the poor girl grew anxious and self-reproachful, and felt herself more or less responsible for the whole misadventure, now that she heard the facts set forth in concise and vigorous language. Percival's

The Restoration

coming was her only solace, and that not unmixed. At this time especially, Madam Trevor's subjects did not sleep on beds of roses.

The early stages of Trevor's illness were characterized by an angelic sweetness, but as time wore on, and the monotony of his own room began to pall upon him, his amiability rubbed off, and revealed the fact that his virtues were not yet ripe for Heaven. He was fond of amusement, and he had none; he loved high living, and was forced to subsist on slops. His weakness irritated him. He was tired of himself and his feelings. Besides, he had sustained a very serious disappointment, of which so far he had said nothing—and he was not accustomed to disappointments. When the dapper Belgian nurse and valet whom Percival had engaged for him was guilty of a moment's haste in bringing the tray, containing two slices of toast and a bowl of mutton-broth, or if in setting it upon the table there was an undue clinking of dish and spoon, it must be confessed that the invalid swore at him with vigor and fluency. If any one in the house slammed a door or made a noise in the hall, his nerves were set on edge, and he looked injured until the next thing happened. He wished to know why nobody ever touched the piano; but when Spriggy obligingly went down-stairs and played his favorite tunes, he declared that the music made his head ache, and ordered Hyacinthe to close the door. He had not asked for Clip, and his grandmother would not agitate him by speaking of her illness, especially as she herself had little

A Victim of Circumstances

patience with nerves. In his own mind he set the girl down as both obstinate and unfeeling. He was resolved not to see her again, but at least she might make an effort to see him. However, he knew that he ought to be thankful that his eyes were opened in time to her real feelings, and he held Spriggy truly fortunate in having discovered the truth about Courtenay. Indeed, his sentiments at Miss Harcourt's escape were truly pious, if the same cannot be said of the feelings with which he regarded his own.

He sat now every afternoon at his window in a reclining chair, propped up with cushions and arrayed in a gorgeous flowered dressing-gown, watching the pony-carriage come and go, and the arrival and departure of inquiring neighbors. He noticed that Clip neither went out nor came in, so he concluded that she had been sent away in disgrace, but he scorned to inquire about her movements. Spriggy came only with her grandmother for five-minute visits, and Bobby was not allowed to penetrate the seclusion of his convalescence. Percival went out and in at all times, but discreetly refrained from broaching the forbidden subject, so his sensibilities were not unnecessarily ruffled until one afternoon, immediately after Madam Trevor's departure for a meeting of the guild, Spriggy slid softly into the room and closed the door after her, with determination in the click of the latch. He had been playing "Patience," which Mrs. Floyd had taught him, coming over from Graystone especially for the purpose. She said she didn't know what

The Restoration

would become of her without "Patience." She played thirty-six games, all different. She taught him three, and had an attack in his room, which diverted him considerably at the time, though after she had gone he ungratefully called her a watering-pot. He looked up now, when the door opened, and regretted to see only his cousin, whom he was bound to treat with a show of civility.

"Since you have come," he said, in a jaded tone, "would you be good enough to pull down that shade? The beastly sun slants right into my eyes, and of course Hyacinthe is down-stairs whenever I want him, fixing some disgusting mess or other for me to swallow."

"The sun is good for you, you know, and you shouldn't strain your eyes looking at those cards in a half-light," said the practical Spriggy.

"Take them away, then," said the invalid, and she removed the lapboard which rested on the arms of his chair, and set it on the table. Then she came back, seated herself opposite him, and opened the campaign.

"I thought I should never have a chance to really talk to you," she began, "and I knew there were all sorts of things you wanted to say to me, so I took advantage of guild meeting to come and sit with you."

"I'm deeply grateful, I'm sure," said Trevor, dryly, "but I'm afraid you won't find me as interesting as you expect."

"Well, I'll tell you something, then," said Spriggy,

A Victim of Circumstances

cheerfully. "Clip went down-stairs for the first time to-day."

"Indeed!" said Trevor, in a terrible tone of politeness. "Nobody saw fit to inform me that she had been ill."

"When you didn't see her, you must have known that she was kept away by some good reason," said Spriggy.

"I supposed she stayed away because she knew I didn't wish to see her," Trevor observed, belligerently.

"Well, you're an ardent lover, I must say!" she exclaimed, indignantly.

"I don't pretend to rival Courtenay," he answered, with a degree of unpleasantness that brought the tears to her eyes.

"I'm sure," she cried, with apparent irrelevance, "I sometimes wish I hadn't a penny to my name, so that people might occasionally like me for myself."

"You're a very foolish child," said her cousin. "At least, you will never be driven into making a mercenary marriage, yourself."

"Do you still think I was in love with him?" she asked.

"Oh, I hope not. One in the family is enough," said Trevor.

"Who? What nonsense!" said Spriggy, scornfully. "You know very well that he hadn't the least reason to think so."

"Oh, well, I don't propose to discuss it," said Trevor. "Have it your own way."

The Restoration

"You can't mean to tell me that she was to blame for what that wretched cousin of yours did to her?"

"Good heavens, am *I* to blame for his being my cousin? I question her taste, but when you attempt to convince me that she couldn't have helped it—"

"Roy," Miss Harcourt interposed, with heroic patience, "I try to make allowances for your being ill, and naturally annoyed at what has happened, but I own I am losing patience with you."

"No one but a violent partisan like you would expect me to forgive her," said Trevor.

"Forgive her for what? Upon my word!" cried Spriggy.

"Of course, if I had died, it would have been my duty to forgive her," the pious invalid pursued; "but as I happened to live, she must know very well that I do nothing of the sort."

"How can you be so unreasonable?" Spriggy demanded.

"Did she send you here?" he asked, in his turn.

"Indeed she didn't. I'm not at all sure that she would forgive *you*."

"Then I don't see why you should constitute yourself her advocate. She doesn't desire it, and I'm sure *I* don't," said Trevor. "This is a nice way to amuse me, isn't it? Any girl but you would be ready to tear her eyes out, and yet you take her part as though she had never interfered with you. I believe she has bewitched you with all the rest of us."

"She has never done me any harm," said Spriggy, stoutly; "and even if she had, I shouldn't be jus-

A Victim of Circumstances

tified in seeing her treated like this without making an effort to set matters straight again."

"You're a good girl, Spriggy," said Trevor, and tried to take her hand, but she was angry, and would not look at him. "I don't see why I didn't happen to fall in love with you at first."

"Because I didn't happen to be Clip," said Spriggy, succinctly. "Now, don't be foolish and try to make me fancy that you don't care for her. You are not capable of a very deep affection, I own, and you are not a model of constancy, but as far as you can love any one, you love her. As for me, I won't be better than nothing for anybody."

"I didn't expect that you would be," he replied. "You have a wholesome kind of beauty—not the sort that gets into a man's eyes and blinds him to everything else. I was infatuated with her pretty face. It's the most charitable view one can take of the matter to assume that there's nothing else to her."

"If I didn't believe that you would change your mind when you come really to think it over, I shouldn't be talking to you now," said Spriggy.

"You have a talent for believing whatever you choose to believe, without rhyme or reason," he replied, with cousinly frankness. "All the same, you are mistaken. I've been in a fool's paradise three months too long, and now that I'm out of it, I don't propose to run my head into the noose again. I thought I was anxious to marry, but I'm not. I've made an ass of myself before, but never to any such extent as this. I don't altogether blame

The Restoration

the poor girl. I know now that she was forced into it. You may tell her I said so, if you like."

"I should never dare tell her that I've spoken to you at all," said Miss Harcourt. "As for you, *you* were not forced into it, and you were the first to give offence. From the moment that Mrs. Acres set foot in the house—and she meant to break it off, I know she did—you have been going from bad to worse. For my part, I am shocked to find you so fickle and unreliable, and when you have lost Clip you may realize what a mistake you have made. I have no patience with you, and even grandmamma doesn't think you perfect any longer. And when she has married Clip to somebody else, as you know very well she will, no doubt you'll come to me and ask me why I didn't *advise* you—and I shall tell you I'm glad of it, and it serves you right—so there! You needn't expect any sympathy from *me*." With angry zeal she straightened his cushions, and marched out of the room, slamming the door after her.

CHAPTER XXV

MR. FLOYD PLAYS THE PART OF MINISTERING ANGEL TO HIS UNCLE

AS the weather grew colder Mr. Maturin Townshend's ailments became more troublesome, and he returned to town to place himself under treatment. He requested Percival to accompany him, but Percival declined to remain, and Percy took his place. This was something of a trial to both uncle and nephew, but Mr. Townshend required company, and Percy would run no risks of offending him by a refusal to devote his leisure hours to reading aloud, card-playing, or writing at dictation. It must be confessed that the old gentleman was not at this time the delightful companion he sometimes showed himself. He had a manner of alluding to his nephews' weaknesses which glided off of Bobby, drew sparks from Percival, and struck the long-suffering Percy as nothing short of brutal. He did not enjoy the doctor's visits, or the hour's drive at noon, which was the only outing permitted to him. Percy could not leave his business even for the sake of accompanying his uncle in these airings, especially since he had been very liberal to himself that summer in the matter of vacation, and felt

Mr. Floyd as a Ministering Angel

that he ought to atone for his indulgence by unusual application to his affairs; so Mr. Townshend drove alone from Washington Square to the Park, in his great blue barouche, fretting all the way. His house was dull and lonely. He had never refurnished it since his father's day, and the walls were still painted in imitation of satin panels, which he had covered with his constantly increasing collection of pictures. There were velvet curtains and lambrequins hanging from the great gilt cornices. When Mrs. Floyd came in to luncheon after a morning's shopping, she cried over the dust in the folds of these curtains, and Mrs. Augusta Townshend, Percy's mother, who occasionally called to inquire after poor Maturin's health and to predict dreadful things of his unregenerate soul, said that they should be put out on a line and beaten. There were a great many Eastern curiosities—carved ivory balls, blue dogs, lacquer and cloisonné, little bronze demons, and tall jars which Bobby insisted on using as ash-receivers. Up-stairs there was an excellent library, at which Percy cast longing eyes; but, alas, Mr. Townshend scorned improving books, such as his nephew delighted in, and preferred memoirs of the Regency and modern novels. "I have Daudet's latest book—it seems to be charming," the old gentleman announced at dinner. "It is positively pitiful that neither you nor Bobby can read French aloud. I suppose I must wait until Sidney comes."

Mr. Floyd had invited himself to pay his uncle a visit. This proved less of a relief to Percy than

A Victim of Circumstances

he had fondly hoped, for Bobby's idea of entertaining Mr. Townshend consisted of suggesting pastimes which the doctor had strictly prohibited—visits to draughty theatres and restaurants and little runs down to various country clubs being the best diversion for an ailing elderly gentleman that his fertile imagination could devise. When Mr. Townshend, with some natural irritation, had declined to witness the play for which his footlight-loving nature yearned, Bobby would merrily go forth by himself, and leave his cousin to reap the reward of ill-timed suggestions. "If you could only give one a lucid description of what you see," Mr. Townshend sighed, hopelessly, "or if your opinion were worth listening to, there might be some satisfaction in having you go—but as it is, you needn't trouble yourself, for you simply irritate me."

"Well, I don't wonder that you feel owlish," said Mr. Floyd, tolerantly. "It's this beastly dieting. I did think though that you wouldn't allow your cook to let herself down—it's such a bad plan." After this delicate hint he was aggrieved to find on the following night that the *ménu* was no more elaborate than before. "No entrées of any sort?" he demanded of the butler, in an injured tone. "Nothing to drink but claret?" Unluckily his uncle overheard him, and turned to him as soon as the man had left the room, with the anticipation of a cat about to catch its mouse.

"If I had known that I was to be honored with this visit," he said, blandly, "I should have engaged a chef from Delmonico's for your especial benefit ;

Mr. Floyd as a Ministering Angel

but as I have the misfortune to be on a régime myself, I fear you would find yourself better suited elsewhere."

"Well, I must say I never knew you to set such a plain table before. Here I've been half starved at Fortmounthouse all summer, and now I come down to town expecting something a little elaborate, and I find roast beef and rice-pudding, by Jove! It's enough to discourage a man."

"Wabash Preferred went up to ninety to-day," Percy interpolated, hastily.

"It really doesn't look well," Mr. Floyd continued, regardless of the interruption, "to have nothing to drink that you can't drink yourself, and the same with made dishes. It's as though you grudged them to other people who could enjoy them, you know."

"It wouldn't impair your appetite if I did," Mr. Townshend observed.

"No, thank Heaven, I'm not unduly sensitive," said Bobby, piously. "By-the-way, Percy, did you notice that checked suit that Jack Herries had on this morning? It was the swellest thing I ever saw, and I'm going to have one off the same cloth. I got his tailor's address."

"I don't think it will be becoming to you," said Percy. "You haven't the height to carry it off."

"I really wish I might see you for once becomingly dressed, and not tricked out in vulgar checks and stripes," said Mr. Townshend. "It's no affair of mine, of course, but if I had spent every penny I had in the world on making a guy of myself and

A Victim of Circumstances

ruining my digestion, I shouldn't at present be honored with your distinguished regard."

"Oh, come now. I don't believe they will canonize you yet awhile," said Mr. Floyd, with wicked familiarity. "Madam Trevor herself thinks you're a hell of a fellow."

"Bobby is joking," Percy explained. "Madam Trevor is an emphatic person, but not a profane one."

Mr. Townshend glanced hopelessly from one nephew to the other, and felt himself singularly cursed by fate. He resolved to write again for Percival.

"Well, it isn't very lively at Fortmounthouse just now," Mr. Floyd went on, with the best intentions. "The general hasn't turned up yet, and ten to one he won't. Roy's still in his room, Clip's going about with a face like a sheet, and the old lady is as cheerful as a hearse. What the attraction can be to keep Sidney there—but, of course, I know. It's Spriggy."

"I do not believe," said Percy, severely, "that either he or Miss Harcourt would authorize you to say anything of the kind."

"Well, I hope it isn't, I'm sure. He's an old flirt, anyway," said Bobby. "It's quite as likely to be Clip. I shouldn't wonder if the engagement was off. He was always dead spoons on Clip, and if Roy backs out, no doubt he'll sail in."

"Beautiful vocabulary—exquisite choice of English!" Mr. Townshend was heard to murmur.

"Oh, come, now!" said Mr. Floyd, modestly.

Mr. Floyd as a Ministering Angel

"Well, I did expect to dance at a wedding in December, but from present appearances I sha'n't be asked. I saw in my mind's eye just how it would be—the old lady sailing around in her black velvet and all her shiners, the general in full-dress uniform, or whatever you call it, me an usher, Roy with a white rose in his button-hole and a very red face, and Sid as best man with a sickly grin on his—and Spriggy maid of honor. I had all my plans made to throw rice on 'em from the top of the *portecochère* and hear Roy curse as they drove off. And all those hulking young giraffes of Van Rensselaer cousins would have been bridesmaids, and I should be paired off with the biggest one of the lot."

"They always seemed to me very well-featured young ladies," Percy remonstrated.

"Oh, they're pretty enough, if you've got a telescope handy," said Mr. Floyd, "but when girls run bigger than Spriggy, they are too big for me. But I needn't alarm myself, for there won't be any wedding."

"If Mrs. Trevor made the match, as you seem to think, it is inconceivable that she should allow it to be broken off," said Percy. "Besides, Roy is really not that sort of a person."

"I don't know that I blame him," said Bobby. "If I found that a girl was only marrying me for my money, and liked another man the best, I'd cry quits myself. She was flung at his head in the first place. The old woman managed the whole thing. And when you consider that Courtenay tried to kill him on her account—yes, he did. You

A Victim of Circumstances

needn't make signs at me. It's all in the family, anyhow, and I shall say what I please."

"In the family or out of it, you have no right to fetch and carry scandalous tales of people from whom you have received all manner of kindnesses," said Mr. Townshend. "There must be a streak of puppyism in the Floyd family, for certainly no Townshend ever displayed such coarseness and ill-breeding."

"Upon my word, I won't stand this," cried Mr. Floyd, who with all his defects could certainly be accused of no cowardice or toadyism in his dealings with his uncle. "Damn it, Uncle Maturin, am I not to open my mouth? Ain't I old enough to know my own mind and speak it? By Jove! it's none of your business, anyhow, and I won't be insulted by you or anybody else."

Percy was white with alarm. "He really doesn't mean what he says," he gasped, in extenuation.

"Yes, I do, you meddlesome old granny," cried Mr. Floyd.

"We will have no discussion," said Mr. Townshend. "Bobby leaves here to-morrow morning after breakfast, and comes back when he can conduct himself like a gentleman. I'm worn to death with both of you. Neither one knows how to enter my room properly in the morning. Percy tiptoes—and there is nothing more irritating to an invalid's nerves than to hear some one come tiptoeing into his room as though he were already in his coffin. Don't, I beg of you, act like an undertaker. Bobby bounces, and slams, and explodes, and cracks.

Mr. Floyd as a Ministering Angel

vulgar jokes. Now, I am not fond of horse-play. I've no doubt that Percy's idea of entertaining me consists in looking like a chief mourner, and Bobby's in emulating the buffoon in a pantomime, but unfortunately neither conception happens to coincide with mine. I'm tired of being irritated. I want to be amused. Now, Sidney can be entertaining when he chooses. Percy, you may write to your cousin to-morrow and tell him that I must see him immediately."

"He won't come," Bobby predicted, "and if you object to me, I don't see how you are going to stand him."

"His manners are not those of a loutish plough-boy," Mr. Townshend kindly explained. "He has occasionally been known to have an original idea. He doesn't dress like a Bowery confidence man. He can sit still for ten minutes at a time without bouncing or howling or crossing his legs, and he doesn't when in repose present an appearance of carefully suppressed agony. He can appreciate a good dinner without making an exhibition of gluttony, and he doesn't get sportive towards the end, or look at a second glass of anything as if it were poison; above all, he doesn't go *hee-hawing* around the house at his own smartness. He has his mitigating qualities."

"Well, it won't be long before distance will be lending enchantment to your views of *me*," said Bobby, gulping down his claret. "Perhaps *then* you'll realize what devilish mean things you've said to me. If this is the way you talk to Sid, I

A Victim of Circumstances

don't wonder he won't come. He can afford to be independent, confound him. Now, here am I, poor as all get-out, and owing bills right and left; and if you were worth twice as many millions, by Jove! I'll be hanged if I'd take such abuse from you! And I can tell you that, if he *does* come, and you insult him as you do me, he won't be good-natured about it as *I* am; *he'll* swear at you!" With this the angry and implacable gentleman flung down his napkin, pushed back his chair, and struggling hastily into his overcoat, snatched his hat and cane from the rack and rushed to the club to write an account of his wrongs to his absent cousin, coupled with a request for an immediate loan.

CHAPTER XXVI

A PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE

PERCIVAL called upon his uncle to decline his invitation, and was greeted with the tenderest effusion. Never had Mr. Townshend showed himself more delightful, though only vague promises of future visits could be wrung from the favored guest. "I suppose you have your own reasons," the old gentleman said, with a sigh, "and I should only make a nuisance of myself by urging you."

"I don't see, though, what you wanted of another Bouguereau," said Percival, rather absently.

"You must come before the Academy opens," said his uncle. "I shall not be able to go myself, and you know I like to buy something every year."

"They are so apt to be bad," Percival objected.

"They will never be any better if we don't encourage them," Mr. Townshend opined. "It is the duty of every person of means to buy pictures, especially of young artists."

"How about statues?"

"Oh, if one had an Italian garden—" said Mr. Townshend, with a shrug for his brother-in-law.

The next day was a Saturday, and instead of spending it beside his uncle's chair, four o'clock

A Victim of Circumstances

found him sitting in the Trevors' library with the two girls. The magnate had just brought in with her own hands a steaming bowl of some sort of herb tea for Clip, and on seeing him had pressed upon him another bowl of the same mixture, and stood over him while he drank it. "And to gain her good opinion I would have taken brimstone and sulphur," he declared to the sympathizing pair when she had gone.

It was at this point that Mr. Floyd burst in upon them, shook hands all around, and immediately sipped a spoonful of Clip's still smoking beverage. "What's this?" he cried, making a wry face. "Hell-broth? Do they feed you on gall and wormwood for your sins? Great Jones! It makes me shiver all the way down."

"It isn't nice, certainly," said Clip. "What should you say if you were obliged to take it twice a day?"

"I should say 'Damn'!" Mr. Floyd returned promptly. "Clip Trevor, what have you been doing to yourself? Why, where's your color, child? Where are your dimples? You look like a ghost."

Clip's lip quivered. "I know I'm not a pleasing object," she said, trying to speak lightly, "but it's not very polite in you to tell me so."

"Never mind. You'll soon be breaking hearts again," said Mr. Floyd, consolingly. "In another month or so you will have the whole neighborhood by the ears once more. We'll import a couple more Englishmen, and a French count or two, and give them the run of the house, and in a fortnight they

A Precautionary Measure

will be shooting each other out on the cliff, and the survivor will get into our punt and sing a death-song as he floats down the tide."

"Your imagination does you credit," said Clip, sipping her tea, with overflowing eyes.

Bobby was actually a trifle ashamed of himself, and went over to Spriggy, leaving his victim to recover from the effects of his ill-chosen jests as best she might. In a few moments Percy rang the bell, and was ushered into the library. He had taken another half-holiday. His solemn face lit up at the sight of Spriggy, but he had little opportunity of talking to her, for Bobby stuck obstinately at her side. Percy accordingly sat down by Clip, and inquired after her health. He was still a trifle afraid of her, but on this occasion she dispelled his fears and won his regard in a manner little short of surprising. She talked to him, with a little confidential air, of nothing in particular; she delicately conveyed the impression that she admired him very much, and that Spriggy shared her sentiments. Her great eyes were so soft and pathetic, her manner was so appealing, and her whole appearance so fragile, that Percy found himself warming to an actual championship of her cause. Of course she had not been to blame. If Roy believed it, he must be little short of a brute. He thought what a charming wife she would make for some man, and even detected her resemblance to Spriggy.

At length Miss Harcourt suggested that, as she was about to drive Clip to the dressmaker's, her visitors should pay their respects to the invalid

A Victim of Circumstances

up-stairs, and join her once more in the library on her return. Accordingly they trooped up to Trevor's room, where he was still confined, for his wound healed slowly, and there was always danger of inflammation. He was enchanted to see them, and asked eagerly for the news from town. Percival was partially ignored. He had become an old story—the others were novelties. Bobby, pleased at this opportunity of bringing his stock in trade to a new market, briskly retailed the latest gossip, and called on Percy to bear witness to his heroic conduct in his latest encounter with his uncle. "And it won't be a fortnight," he finished, triumphantly, "before he'll be sending for me again, and giving me something handsome into the bargain. I know how to treat him—and I'm the only one that does. I intend to show him that he can't call me names without paying for it."

"What was the row about?" Trevor asked.

"Nothing at all. A perfectly innocent little remark of mine—any child might have made the same."

"Yes, but what did you say?"

"Bless me, I don't remember," said Mr. Floyd, mendaciously. "Nothing of the slightest consequence."

"But you *will* irritate him," Percy remonstrated.

"Well, I'll bet he likes me better than he does you," Mr. Floyd averred. "I'll bet he hasn't told you about his new will."

"What did he say? You didn't introduce the subject yourself, I trust," said Percy.

A Precautionary Measure

"I pumped him," Mr. Floyd answered, proudly.

"Tell us about it. I hope he has put me down for something handsome," said Trevor. "He dotes on me."

"You rich fellows are all grasping," Bobby declared. "The more you have, the more you want. You could all buy and sell me, and yet you don't see any injustice in scheming to get the inside track with the old man, and cutting me out of my rightful share. When a man's poor he's bound to be sordid, but when he's blessed with a good income he has no business to be mercenary. Hang it all! If I had even one million, I'd be pastoral—I'd be idyllic. My home would be Arcadia, and I'd lend to any poor devil who asked me. And then to think that the money isn't to be divided, and that two of us are going to get put off with a beggarly legacy—I declare, it's enough to make a man turn socialist!"

"Well, it's his, and he made it—the most of it," said Percival, "and I don't blame a man for insisting on doing as he pleases with his own. I should be pastoral myself, but I don't make any speculations in sheep and blue ribbons before the will has been sent to probate."

"Besides which, he is likely to outlive us all," said Percy.

"What is more," Mr. Floyd, Alnaschar-like, continued, "I'd be pious! I'd go to church every Sunday and put a big bill in the plate. It's all very well for Percy to do that now—anyway, he's a Presbyterian—"

A Victim of Circumstances

"I don't see what that has to do with it," said Percy.

"Well, I like a good show for my money. Give me the Episcopal Church, and a good high one at that," cried Bobby. "They're too low to suit me here at Saint Elizabeth's, but when I come into my money and fix up Graystone I'll run the church to suit myself, and I tell you I'll make things hum. I'll have choir-boys, and vespers, and incense, and candles everywhere—see if I don't. And Berry will have to shave off that beard and wear a lace tidy on his shoulders, or he can't officiate in *my* church."

"You will have to leave off swearing, I'm afraid, if you anticipate becoming a pillar of the church," said Percival.

"Not at all. Look at Roy," said Mr. Floyd. "But, seriously, I've been thinking it all over, and whichever way you look at it, there's bound to be a grand row about that will. If Percy gets the pile, Sid and I will kick. If I get it, you'll all be down on me like the wolf on the fold. If Sid gets it, that will be the meanest trick of all. If he divides it fairly and squarely, like a sensible man (which he won't), some one is bound to feel hot because he didn't get the lump."

"From the tenor of your remarks I should judge that you expected Uncle Maturin's demise to take place very shortly," said Percival. "Now, I found him particularly lively, and I am to go to the Academy and buy five thousand dollars' worth of American art for him."

A Precautionary Measure

"Still, you never can tell," said Bobby, sagely. "At his age, and with his diseases, it is just as well to be prepared. Now, my idea is this: in order to avoid lawsuits, and no end of rows and bad feeling, suppose we agree now, while we are all equally in the dark as to his intentions, not to oppose the will, whatever it may be."

"In the event of his dying, of course," Percy interpolated.

"You see, you will all have the advantage of me in any case," Mr. Floyd went on to explain, "for if I gain, you have plenty already, and if I lose, you have more and I have nothing. So, if you or Sid come out ahead, instead of kicking and fighting and making you no end of trouble, I let the will stand; and if I come out ahead, you do the same for me. Do you catch my meaning? I amused myself the other day drawing it up in correct legal form. Just cast your eye over it, and see what you think of it."

"How if he leaves it away from all of us?" Percival asked.

"Read on, and you'll see that I have provided against that. If he should do such an unnatural thing, this compact may be dissolved by mutual consent, and we'll all fight. It only needs the signatures to be as tight and fast as can be, if I know anything about the law."

"You don't mean that you want us to sign that paper?" Percival asked, laughing.

"Why not? Don't you think it's a good idea, Percy?" its originator demanded, in aggrieved tones.

A Victim of Circumstances

"On the whole, I do," said Percy, after a moment's deliberation. "There is nothing more disagreeable than a lawsuit in the family."

"Here's my name, then," said Mr. Floyd, signing with a flourish. Percy followed, looking rather secretive.

"Anything to avoid litigation," said Percival, still laughing, and appended his signature.

"Now," said Bobby, proudly, "I'm going to give this to Madam Trevor to keep—or Spriggy—which shall it be?"

"Miss Harcourt," said Percy, promptly, and as no one objected, the originator placed his precious document in an envelope, and wrote her name on the outside.

"Let's have a drink on it," he said. "I suppose the wine-cellar is locked, and there's no stealing the key. I don't know but the old girl has turned prohibitionist since the general's supper."

"What is more, I'm allowed nothing but slops," said Trevor. "You can't imagine what a craving I have for the simplest little relishes, but between doctors and old women I can get only pap. How can a man expect to regain his strength without plenty of really nourishing food and drink? These country doctors don't know their business, anyhow. If Van Horn were to see me again, he would have me down-stairs to-morrow. I think I'll send for him to come up. And my appetite is awful. I believe I could eat a whole box of sardines."

"I shouldn't think sardines ought to hurt anybody—a simple little fish like that," said Percy.

A Precautionary Measure

"If you crave a thing, it's a sign you need it," Bobby opined.

"Well, they won't give it to me," said Trevor, in an injured tone.

"Ideas about nursing have changed greatly in the last few years—which Mrs. Trevor would naturally be slow to recognize," said Percy. "Uncle Maturin is on a diet, yet he is allowed simple things like beef and mutton."

"And I'm sure they gave you champagne when you had pneumonia, didn't they, Sidney?" Mr. Floyd inquired. "It wouldn't hurt him a bit, and I've a great mind to fix him up a nice little supper myself. Mrs. Trevor need be none the wiser. We won't take her things. There's champagne at Sid's, and sardines at our house. I'll skin out the back way, and be with you in a quarter of an hour, if I don't have to walk. I'll take Harlequin."

"Only don't let him stand in the wind," said Percival. "He is in the box-stall here now, and he has a tendency to take cold."

"What a fuss you make over that bad-tempered brute," said his cousin. "I'll keep him under glass. Good-bye, my friends. I rather think I shall come back by the window, so have a rope to haul the basket up, and some plates and glasses."

Percival foraged for crockery without meeting any one, for Madam Trevor was in the linen closet, trying to account for some missing napery, and for a wonder did not hear him in his journeys. Mr. Floyd at length appeared under the window, breathless, but triumphant. "Here you are!" he cried.

A Victim of Circumstances

"Nobody else could have ridden that horse without breaking the bottles. He pounded the life out of me, but he's safe in the stall now, and nothing smashed. Don't let it swing." He followed the basket and bounced into the room. "See what a spread you're going to have, old man! Sardines, pâté, a chunk of ice, and four quarts of Pommery Sec, also a cold partridge and a can-opener."

"I never was so glad to see you, Bobby," said Trevor, fervently. Mr. Floyd pinned a towel around his waist and began an unequal struggle with the sardine-box. Percy, with more good-will than skill, chipped ice with a shoe-horn, and Trevor looked on with lively anticipation.

"I can't promise to get this cork out, for I can't cut the wire," said Percival. "Look out, now. I know it's going to slop."

"Sit down. Your party is ready," said Percy, filling the glasses with pounded ice.

"Mr. Trevor," said Bobby, with mock ceremony, "may I give you a bit of this bird? Mr. Townshend, will you have a wing? Mr. Percival, I will give you the neck, since you don't wish to spoil your dinner. Come here, you lazy dog, and get it yourself. Mr. Floyd, will you have a bit of breast? You will, and eke a tea-cake. Sidney, have the goodness to stop looking superior and pass 'round the pâté."

"No neck for me. I prefer nothing," said Percival, helping himself to some pâté and a wafer. "Give Percy some breast, and don't save all the best for yourself."

A Precautionary Measure

"How does it taste, old man?" Mr. Floyd inquired, radiating benevolence.

"Wait until you have starved for a month and see," said Trevor. "I feel like a new man already."

"I trust the door is locked," said Bobby.

"I have not had an opportunity to speak to Madam Trevor yet. It would be awkward if she should come in and find me here when she does not know that I am in the house," said Percy. "I know she is very particular about those things, and she is quite right. I should hate to have her think me rude."

"She doesn't seem to like you much, anyhow," said Bobby, recklessly, "and if she found you here at five o'clock drinking and stuffing, you would be in her black-books forever. She expects it in us, but she wouldn't know how to take it in you. Jove! I rather wish she would walk in, to see that we're not the only gluttons and drunkards in the world!"

"I don't care about seeing her while there is a morsel left to rob me of," said Trevor, lingering fondly over his bird.

Mr. Floyd, just opening a third bottle, took this occasion to tickle Percy with a corkscrew. Percy strove to take it away from him, for he was feeling quite reckless and devilish, and a brief struggle ensued, during which a little of the froth was spilled on Percival's collar.

"Don't make a Waterloo of me, I beg," the latter entreated mildly, but as Mr. Floyd persisted in sporting around him, he first relieved him of the bottle, then deposited him bodily on the bed.

A Victim of Circumstances

"Let her come!" said Trevor, with a sigh of repletion. "I have eaten everything."

Percy was already picking up the litter, and, with the most laudable intentions, threw the partridge bones into the open fire. "The young ladies will be coming home presently," he observed. "Perhaps we had better go down-stairs. It is growing very dark."

Here Mr. Floyd leaped from the bed and flung himself, howling, upon Percival in retaliation for his disrespectful treatment. In the scuffle which ensued he managed to upset and break the unopened bottle, and the carpet was littered with broken glass and flooded with champagne. In the midst of the encounter there was a loud and imperative rap at the door. In the sudden and awful silence which ensued, Madam Trevor's voice was heard demanding admittance. Percy, with great presence of mind, pulled the screen before the fire, thus hiding the remains of the orgy from the eye if not from the nose, and Bobby, still giggling and choking, thrust the plates and glasses into the closet, but the tell-tale heap of broken glass still remained in evidence, and nobody cared to risk cut fingers in removing it. In the semi-darkness each looked at the others for inspiration. There was no time to waste. Already the door was opening. "Sit on it, Percy—and be quick about it!" Mr. Floyd commanded, and the luckless young man, being nearest the wreck, and panic-stricken at the situation, mechanically obeyed. His position was precarious, uncomfortable, and undignified in

A Precautionary Measure

the extreme, for he was obliged to bear his weight on his hands, hovering like a badly constructed suspension-bridge over the wreck. Percival kindly obscured him from view as much as possible, but Percy could not help thinking that it would have been kinder to show him the folly of his martyrdom while yet there was time. He prayed that the darkness might conceal his plight. Better that he should be thought neglectful of etiquette than made to appear ridiculous in the house where he was most anxious to stand well.

"What is this disgusting smell of burning?" the magnate inquired, as she entered.

"I noticed it myself," said Trevor. Percival placed a chair for her, and politely hoped that their noise had not disturbed her.

"I am accustomed by this time to every variety of astonishing sounds, but I should think Roy might find them trying," she responded. Her voice revealed the fact that her temper was more than commonly ruffled. Poor Percy's misery augmented. She had not seen him. Ought he to reveal himself? The situation was intolerable.

"Well," said Bobby, in an injured tone, "they were all pitching into me, and I suppose I *did* yell once or twice. Sidney has got the most awful grip! Cold weather, isn't it, Mrs. Trevor?"

"Yes; I am quite surprised to see you in the country," the magnate rejoined.

"Well, the fact is, I'm a little unsettled just now," he confessed.

A Victim of Circumstances

"Where is Hyacinthe? Have you had your mutton-broth, Roy?" she demanded.

"I sent him down to the village. I wanted an evening paper," said the invalid.

"The girls could have brought you one. I have no doubt you will be feverish after all this hubbub, and have another bad night," his grandmother predicted. "Bobby, how is your mother?"

"I guess she's all right," said Mr. Floyd.

"Somebody said that Percy Townshend was here," said Madam Trevor, looking around the room.

"Yes," said Bobby, glibly. "He left his regards for you, and was sorry not to see you."

"He didn't go to the village with the girls, I trust?" she inquired, with an inflection which conveyed to the hapless listener an impression of lifted eyebrows.

"Oh no, no! He's gone to walk on the bluff," said Mr. Floyd, mendaciously.

"Why should he do such a foolish thing as that? I am afraid you are trying to throw dust in my eyes," said Madam Trevor, severely. "I am not so easily hoodwinked as you seem to believe. You know that I don't care to have him appear in public with the girls and without me."

Undoubtedly either Percival or Trevor could (and in common humanity should) have turned the conversation at this point, and drawn Mr. Floyd from his favorite pursuit of playing with fire; but, grievous to relate, the whole trio were so enchanted at finding the hitherto impeccable Percy

A Precautionary Measure

in such a plight as their own indiscretions had often reduced them to, that mercy was farthest from their thoughts. Nor, to do them justice, did they dream of the dislike which already filled the magnate's heart towards this admirable young man.

"Why, you surely haven't heard anything about him?" Mr. Floyd queried, with an air of incredulity. "He's as good as gold—never so much as squeezed a girl's hand in his life. Some people may consider him scheming; but, for my own part, I can't see why you should object to that, you hate outspoken people so."

"I seem to have considerable patience with them, however," the magnate replied.

"But, seriously, now, what is your objection to Percy?" the reckless gentleman demanded.

The luckless contraband, unable longer to endure this conversation or its possible disclosures, here coughed shrilly with embarrassment and alarm, and strove to control his cramped limbs sufficiently to arise and reveal himself. Dignity, under the circumstances, was hardly to be looked for, but it was his misfortune to lose his balance just as the magnate's ireful eye discovered him, and land ignominiously on the carpet some six inches from his former resting-place.

"I—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Trevor," he said, in agonized tones. "You really must excuse me. If you will allow me to explain—"

"You are at perfect liberty to get up, Mr. Townshend," the old lady said, cruelly, "and I will spare

A Victim of Circumstances

you your explanations. I can never see the point of practical jokes."

"Good Heavens, Mrs. Trevor! I assure you this is no joke," poor Percy protested.

"Then why are both your cousins laughing at you, to say nothing of Roy? I don't care to hear about it. Those things never amuse me. I am a stupid old woman, no doubt, but I have my preferences, and clowns are not among them." She rose as she spoke, and swept to the door. "I shall send the lights at once," she said, "and Hyacinthe shall bring your supper as soon as he comes back."

"Discharged, without a character!" cried Mr. Floyd, as she sailed through the hall, and with a mad pirouette he knocked over the screen.

"Run after her and apologize for your childlike gayety," said Percival, but Mr. Floyd replied, airily, "Coryphées never apologize—they dance."

"Go after her yourself, Sidney, and explain, for she will never listen to me," Percy urged. "The most unfortunate thing—and it is all very well to laugh, but if you were in my place you would feel more like swearing. You ought to stand by me now. You might have helped me out, and you didn't."

"Oh, Percy, you're a regular devil!" cried Mr. Floyd, enchanted at the turn affairs had taken. "You would do it, you know."

"And it's all very well for *you* to make a fool of yourself," his cousin went on, irately, "but I don't see what necessity there was for dragging *me* into it."

A Precautionary Measure

"If you had only held your tongue—" said Trevor, who was choking with laughter, and refused to comprehend the seriousness of the situation.

"How *could* I hold my tongue when she was talking about me?" the exasperated Percy demanded. "How could I tell what she was going to say next? I won't be an eavesdropper. She was prejudiced enough against me before, but now I am sure she will despise me."

"Well, this isn't the best moment to attack her on the subject, but when next I find her in a softened mood I'll speak a good word for you," Trevor promised, kindly.

"If any of you mention this to the girls," Percy muttered, darkly, "I shall never forgive you to the day of my death."

"Trust the old lady for telling them," Mr. Floyd predicted, cheerfully. "The pony carriage has driven in. I heard it five minutes ago. Come on down-stairs, you roaring blade, and get it over with."

CHAPTER XXVII

CHERCHEZ LA FEMME

PERCIVAL stayed behind for a few words with the invalid. He set a chair over the broken glass, and sat down on it as a precaution against the magnate's return. "Did you row the tailor for me?" Trevor asked.

"Yes, and he's going to send the things to-day. He seemed contrite," said Percival. "I also spoke to them about forwarding your letters from the club. I couldn't find any lilac bath-robe that would fit you, but I must go down again in a day or two, and they may have some others by that time."

"I wish I could do it myself," said Trevor.

"Oh, you don't mind," said Percival, comfortably. "I think you stand it pretty well, myself."

"If I can have a square meal occasionally, I shall get along better," the invalid opined. "Gad! sha'n't I be glad to get out of this!"

"By-the-way," said Percival, "I've had another letter from Robinson about his house. He says he will be perfectly willing to let you have it at your terms, but some other people are looking at it and seem anxious to buy, and he wants a definite answer."

Cherchez la Femme

"Then tell him to go to perdition," said Trevor, shortly. "This looks like buying a house, doesn't it?"

"You will be feeling better by December," said Percival.

"December has nothing to do with it," said Trevor. "As soon as I can get away from here I'm going back to the apartment."

Percival stared at him for a moment, then continued his self-appointed task of clearing up the scattered cards.

"You needn't think I shall be of a different mind to-morrow," Trevor went on. "You can write whatever you please about my reasons, but I don't intend taking the house."

"You won't write yourself, then?" his friend inquired.

"I suppose you think I ought to give him some explanation," said Trevor; "but the fact is, I don't care to wash my dirty linen in public."

"I don't understand you," said Percival.

"You won't understand me," Trevor amended. "You understood quickly enough the last time I referred to the matter, and you were pretty short with me, too, though I should consider it more my affair than yours."

"Well, I meant what I said at the time," Percival assured him.

"I thought you had forgotten it," said Trevor. "You haven't acted for the past month as though we had had any words about the matter." He made an incipient conciliatory motion with his hand towards the table on which Percival leaned his arm,

A Victim of Circumstances

but his friend was examining the border of tulips with which Miss Harcourt had embellished it, and either missed or ignored the overture.

"You have had a pretty tight squeak, you see," he said. "I hoped it had changed your feelings, as it changed mine for you."

"You were really so hot about it, then?" Trevor asked.

"What is the use of discussing it? You know how I felt."

"Then if I hadn't come to grief you would have broken with me? It's a rather hard thing that a friendship of years' standing should be threatened simply because I believe the evidence of my own eyes," said Trevor.

"Don't you think we had better change the subject?" Percival suggested.

"You mean, change my mind," Trevor corrected. "That is what Spriggy has been dinning into my ears until I dread the sight of her. Any one would think that *I* was the offender. Now, I tell you frankly that on this subject argument is wasted. I merely mention it to show you that I have had enough of it."

"I'm sorry, for I promised Courtenay to give you an explanation from him," said Percival, "and I'm afraid I must insist on delivering his message. He asked me to tell you that the fault was entirely his, that he had no excuse to offer for his conduct, and that he had behaved like a brute. He left his apologies for you and for her—more particularly for her."

Cherchez la Femme

"Oh, of course. Any man would say the same," Trevor remarked, impatiently. "All the same, I haven't a fancy for handled goods."

Percival rose and pushed his chair away from the table.

"Of course, if you are going to take offence—after all these years—" said Trevor, bitterly. "I never interfered with your affairs, did I? You have ideas about women—absurd ideas—but in my place you would feel as I do. I won't see her again. I own that I was very hard hit. Of course, it was my money she cared for, and I hate a mercenary woman. I don't say I sha'n't get over it—I shall. But I don't care much to talk about her."

"No, I shouldn't say anything more, if I were you," said Percival, dryly.

"I don't know what idea you've got into your head, but you seem to be tremendously down on me," Trevor went on, in an aggrieved tone. "I'm sure I never went back on you, no matter what you did. I wouldn't let any woman on earth come between us. They are not worth it."

"Which of us is going to write to Robinson?" Percival inquired.

"I'll write myself, since you seem so sensitive about it," said Trevor. "I don't see why you're so huffy, though."

"I wish you would wait until you are well before you force me to speak my mind to you," said Percival.

"Presuming on my condition, am I? Hang it all, Sid, I didn't expect this from you," said Trevor,

A Victim of Circumstances

"I told you you might expect it," Percival assured him.

"Are you always going to be taken in by that sort? I should think your last experience would have sufficed you," said Trevor.

Percival swallowed his wrath and moved towards the door. He had some patience, and more experience, with invalids, but he preferred to take himself out of temptation. Trevor, irritated by his silence and wearied by his afternoon of forbidden conviviality, sped a parting shot after him: "There was a time when you were not so ready to leave me for a word. I believe you are in love with her yourself."

Percival faced about squarely and came back. "If you really mean what you said just now," he said, with decision, "perhaps I ought to tell you that, as soon as you have had your explanation with Mrs. Trevor, I shall see her myself and ask her permission to try my luck. Of course, I had given up all thought of it, but this alters the case. And perhaps you will understand why I decline to listen to any more—confidences."

"Then that ends it!" said Trevor.

Percival appeared to agree with him, for he rang the bell for Hyacinthe, and left the room without another word. If Trevor was angry, so was he, but he stopped in the library nevertheless, lured by the sound of voices. The young people were sitting around the open fire, and Percy appeared to have been soothed by their comforting ministrations into a happier frame of mind. Bobby was

Cherchez la Femme

actually eating again, having purloined a piece of plum-cake from the passing Jim, and basked comfortably before the blaze, bursting out occasionally with, "If you could have seen what an ass he made of himself!"

"It is so natural for Bobby to do those things that nobody notices it, but they would seem rather out of place in *you*," Clip murmured to the victim, in consoling accents. The poor girl was learning policy and conciliation a trifle too late for her own benefit.

"I came in to say good-bye," said Percival. "I am going to town to-morrow. Will you try to miss me a little?"

"We shall try *not* to miss you," Spriggy answered.

"But you are coming back?" said Clip. A little later they heard Harlequin's hoofs ringing on the frozen driveway. Trevor heard them, too, with bitterness in his heart, knowing that to him, at least, Percival would not return, and laying this additional sting at Clip's door. Both had said too much and gone too far to retract now. The break was final. He knew his friend too well to expect any peaceful overtures from him, even if the girl had not stood between them. For his own part, he would go lonely through life rather than retract or apologize. So much for love, and, alas, so much for friendship!

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT

ON Union Square Percival met General Trevor, with violets in his button-hole and smiles wreathing his countenance. "Ah, Sidney, how are you, my boy?" he asked, genially. "You see me taking my last look at dear old New York. I have just been sending a few little farewells to the people who have been good to me, for I am off for the wilderness to-night. Come and have a cocktail. It may be six months before I can have one properly mixed again."

"And how are things at Fortmounthouse?" he further inquired, as he made the most of the fleeting moment. "I fully expected to go back after a week or so, but, to tell you the truth, my nerves suffered more than I realized at the time, and I felt that there was no sense in exposing myself to unnecessary shocks. Between you and me, the duchess was a trifle too anxious to see me, and I don't relish being treated *en mauvais sujet*."

"Well, we all took our turn at it," said Percival. "Don't you observe a chastened spirit in me?"

"Mrs. Acres was inquiring particularly after you the other evening," the general observed. "She is

The Winter of Our Discontent

as charming as ever, and is expecting to spend the winter in Washington. By-the-way, I hear our friend Courtenay is in Chicago. Poor devil, I'm sorry for him. If he were not bound to be impecunious, I'd look him up on my way through, but I'm too poor myself to act as ministering angel these days. Your lovely mother is quite well, I hope?"

"Thank you, yes. She will be sorry not to see you," Percival replied, with a feeling of some thankfulness that he would be called upon to witness no further chapters of the general's gallantry at present.

"I have just sent her a few flowers. I hate farewells," said the general, airily. "I spend my life in parting with people and things I adore—but why dwell upon it? I have grown gray in the process, and it hurts me just as much to-day as it did twenty years ago. So you have all taken your medicine at Fortmounthouse? Well, I have never shown the white feather in the field, but I own I tremble at a woman's tongue. You observe I ask no questions. It's my way. When people are ready to inform me of the state of affairs, I listen with interest, but I never am the first to inquire."

"Mrs. Trevor is not imparting much information of late," said Percival. "We have been very quiet for the past month. If anything startling occurs, I will write to you."

"Do, my boy. It is always a comfort to keep in touch with civilization," said the general. He wrung Percival's hand at parting, and beamed upon him quite paternally. How much did he

A Victim of Circumstances

suspect, and shrug away with characteristic Trevor nonchalance? It was fully a fortnight since any news had come from Fortmounthouse. That night Percival went back to dine with his mother, but valiantly kept away from the house on the hill.

Meantime Miss Harcourt was staying late in the country, in considerable perturbation of spirit, feeling that Clip needed her, and yet fearing that her presence was of little avail. A new dignity and reserve had seemed of late to hedge the younger girl about—a veil which her life-long confidante dreaded to penetrate. Spriggy, too, had her own secret, which she could not confess to any one, to Clip least of all. She had been lunching with the Morgans, and was walking home as the first snow of the season began to fall. As she walked rapidly across the short grass towards the house she saw that the carryall stood waiting at the door, with a trunk on the front seat. She had not known that any one was going away. The trunk was marked with Trevor's initials, and Trevor himself appeared on the piazza with his grandmother. Spriggy was about to join them and voice her astonishment when she saw that Madam Trevor was expostulating with him, and that from time to time she raised her handkerchief to her eyes. Feeling that it would be indiscreet to interrupt an interview so evidently private and futile, she turned and walked rapidly back to the main road, hoping to gain a moment's speech with her cousin as he passed. She had gone a good distance when she heard the carryall gaining on her. Evidently Madam Trevor had wasted

The Winter of Our Discontent

some time in useless expostulation. She had condescended to cry before him, and still he was leaving, as obstinately determined as ever. The carriage stopped. Trevor leaned out and extended his hand to her. "I was afraid I shouldn't see you to say good-bye," he said. "Won't you ride down to the station?"

"No. I should like to speak to you," she answered.

He looked at her comprehensively and reproachfully, then with a sigh of resignation got out of the carriage and walked to the side of the road with her.

"Are you going like this, without seeing her?" she asked.

"Don't! Don't!" he protested, half wearily, half angrily. "I have lost one friend for her; don't make me lose another."

Spriggy clinched her gloved hand in unavailing wrath. Her brisk walk had heightened her natural color, and she looked tall and trim in her dark, tight-fitting dress. "Why should *you* fret about it?" he asked, surveying her admiringly. "You are worth a dozen of her. Shake hands and wish me a pleasant journey and better luck next time."

She put her hands behind her. "I can't. I am disappointed in you. You are doing a wicked, cruel thing."

"Well, good-bye then," said Trevor, and drove away, leaving her standing by the roadside.

"Oh, I didn't believe it *could* happen!" she gasped, indignation and incredulity fading into despair. It was too cold to stand still, and there was a dull

A Victim of Circumstances

ache in her throat. She could not go back to the house to face her grandmother and Clip, so she turned and walked once more towards the village.

Near The Cedars she met Percival on his big bay Harlequin. He stopped and dismounted, and they stood by the new wall together, he holding the vicious-looking animal by the bridle as it made tentative snaps at the air with well-exposed teeth, she playing with a dead branch which she had picked up. "You have come from the station. I suppose you met Roy?" she said.

"Yes, I saw him," said Percival.

"Were you coming to us?"

"No, not to-day. I don't think Madam Trevor would care to see me, do you?"

"No, I don't believe she would," said Spriggy, frankly. "Why do you always ride that bad-tempered animal? Is he so interesting?"

"He isn't ugly with me. We understand each other. I'm trying to convince him that he isn't afraid of the cars," said Percival. "He has been shying at the track all the afternoon, poor fellow. I don't blame him for hating them."

"You will be brought home in fragments some day," she predicted.

"Will you come and pick up the pieces?" he asked.

"You would make an awfully good nurse, do you know? But unless it happens this afternoon I sha'n't require one until spring, for we go back to town next week. When do you go, by the way?"

"I'm afraid I ought not to go at all," said Spriggy. "It will be so lonely for grandmamma and Clip."

The Winter of Our Discontent

"Good girl!" said Percival, approvingly.

"No, I'm not. I'm not even as good as I used to be," she answered. "We ought not to stand here and freeze. If Harlequin catches cold while you are talking to me, you won't find me such a worthy creature."

"Worthy? Heaven forbid!"

"I'm quite sure that is what you meant. Roy considers me worthy, too. It isn't very complimentary, but I suppose I ought to be gratified," she remarked, with a sigh.

"I only wish some one would regard me in that light," he said, piously. "Come back with me and see my mother. She is dying of ennui."

"I'm poor company this afternoon. My excellence has 'struck inside,' and she would find me cross and stupid," said Spriggy.

"Then I will tell you something to raise your spirits. Percy is coming up to spend the night at Graystone. How he loves the Floyds!"

"Oh, I hope he won't ask for grandmamma," said Spriggy. "She always did detest him, and since the last time he came it has been worse than ever. She thinks he was trying to play a joke on her, and Bobby just encourages her in the idea. That was a most unfortunate day."

"It was, rather," Percival agreed, "and yet — I don't feel sure."

"Did Roy tell you he was going away?"

"I know nothing about him," said Percival, and their eyes met in swift significance.

"You have quarrelled, then?"

A Victim of Circumstances

"I'm sorry to say we have."

She beat the brown grass at her feet with the dead branch which she still held, and looked away towards the river with a great dumb misery in her heart. She had never felt so disappointed and wretched in all her life before. After all, it had been a happy life until recently, and if she were guilty of the folly of expecting everything, it was high time she cured herself of it. "Well, I'm going home," she said, and gave him her hand. She would not look back to see him vault into the saddle and turn in at his own gate. She was so in sympathy with his every mood that it needed no word from him to tell her of the new ambition that had roused his dormant energies. He was happier, he lived for a definite purpose, and she felt it, and suffered from her unerring instinct of its inspiration.

The house was dark and quiet when she went softly through the hall and into her own room. She felt the need of human sympathy, but she would not and could not open her heart to any one who would remember afterwards, and watch her with knowledge of her miserable secret. Suddenly she rose from her seat before the fire, and climbed the narrow staircase which led to the garret. There, under the eaves, in a little trunk of cherished belongings, lay her favorite doll Hilda, put away with reluctance on her fifteenth birthday, and remembered wistfully ever since. Spriggy knelt on the floor, cradling the beloved effigy in her arms, laying her cheek against its cold bisque face, and murmuring all sorts of tender nonsense into its

The Winter of Our Discontent

discreet ears. "My dearest baby, have you forgotten me? Did you think I had forgotten you, leaving you all alone in the dark and cold? We had such good times together, didn't we, dear, and we thought we should have just the same good times when we were grown up. Never grow up, Hilda. It isn't half as nice as we thought it would be, and I am getting more and more disgraceful all the time. I'm ashamed of myself. I'm mean and spiteful, but she doesn't know it. I ought to *want* to give up to her. I've always had the most. Is it her fault that he loves her best? But he would have cured himself of it, if it were not for this.

"I tried to keep Roy from going. It wasn't because I knew it would make her unhappy— Yes, it was! I *do* love her. I wanted her to be happy, but it was to be in *my* way. I don't know whether she cared for Roy or not. How *could* one know, when grandmamma simply ordered her to love him? Could *I* love any one because I was told to? I ought not to have a thought for myself. She has the worst to bear. But, oh, Hilda, I'm jealous of her! What shall I do? What shall I do?

"It was disgraceful in me to care for him so. He never cared for me in that way. I ought to have known it when he began to tell me things. And when he looked like that to-day, and acted and spoke so differently—why, even his voice is changed! Oh, why was I such a fool? But he doesn't know, my dear, and he never will know. And by-and-by she will love him as I do, and I've got to be glad,

A Victim of Circumstances

and to *like* to see it. I must. It's too much of a disgrace to feel as I do now. I can't ever care for any one in this way again. And, Hilda, I'm not the kind of woman that can live without loving somebody, and without somebody loving me. When Clip is married I shall be so lonely, and you know, dear, I don't care a bit for any of the rest of them, and haven't since last spring, though I did try. There is poor Percy—good and kind, and fond of me, and all that, and he is a sort of a comfort to me, but so different—so very, very different!

“Hilda, dear, if I were a little girl again, I would be different myself. I wouldn't think of him at all. I wouldn't go on remembering him all those years, and believing that every hero I read about looked like him. And I wouldn't have said to myself every time I found any one else at all interesting, ‘Wait until you see him once more.’ If I had known it would be like this, I don't think I would ever have grown up at all.”

Hilda's face was warm now, and wet, and Spriggy held her with a vague sense of relief and comfort. That smiling mouth, parted to show four little teeth, could never betray the shame and sorrow that had been poured into her attentive ears; her wide brown eyes, opened after their long sleep, looked quite human and sympathetic by the light of the candle, and her stiff arms seemed to reach forth affectionately towards her grown-up mother, who sat rocking her to and fro. Confession once made, it was easier for her to lay hold of her ideals again—those dreams which had never failed her until now.

The Winter of Our Discontent

It was Clip's footstep on the stairs that finally broke up her musings, and she carefully laid the doll away in her hiding-place and turned to her cousin, candle in hand. The girl's cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were blazing. She had not the air of a forsaken damsel. "I have been looking for you everywhere," she said. "Mr. Townshend has called, and grandmamma sent word that you were not at home. Mr. Floyd's night-blooming cereus is going to be in blossom this evening, and we are invited to watch it. Do you care about it? I don't."

"Don't you think it would be better than staying at home?" Spriggy suggested.

"Oh, well, we are told to go, for that matter," said Clip. "Grandmamma is putting on her black brocade."

CHAPTER XXIX

A BOTANICAL EVENING

AMONG her other amiable weaknesses, Mrs. Floyd had a taste for match-making, and into her sympathetic ears poor Percy had poured the details of his two misadventures at Fortmounthouse, and his lack of favor in the eyes of the magnate. "Some people can do those things without being ridiculous. I can't," he sighed. "Now I suppose she will always consider me a buffoon."

"It certainly was a pity," Mrs. Floyd replied. "I remember when your uncle Robert first began to show me marked attention, something very similar happened, only it was a window that was broken instead of a bottle; and, now I think of it, it wasn't at our house, but at the James Lees'. At any rate, he is still sensitive when broken glass is mentioned in his presence. Still, I have known Madam Trevor to get over a prejudice, and I'm sure she seems fond enough now of Sidney, in spite of all she used to say about his being badly brought up—which he certainly was."

"Sidney is very much settled," said Percy, approvingly. "I told her so, and it seems to have had some weight with her."

A Botanical Evening

"It's very odd he won't come this evening," Mrs. Floyd remarked. "I thought he would be so pleased to see you and the girls. I have invited the Morgans and Mr. Berry and the Lynchesters, and I would have asked a few more people, but McCloskey is in his usual Monday condition, although it is the middle of the week and I've given him every opportunity to sleep it off, and I cannot trust him with the notes."

At eight o'clock the company began to arrive, and the conservatory buzzed with gossip. The Trevors were late. Were they coming? Was Mrs. Floyd aware that Roy had gone to town with his valet and a great quantity of luggage? Was he coming back? Was it true that the engagement was broken, and, if so, who had broken it? Some laid the blame to General Trevor, some to the magnate, more to Clip herself. What had become of that young Englishman? It was useless for Mrs. Floyd to deny all knowledge of the facts. Of course she knew, so near a neighbor and so intimate a friend! Scandal had been rife in the village from the moment that the general's leaders dashed around the corner by the post-office, and it was considered that the Trevors were guilty of introducing fast city life into the hitherto well-regulated circles of Fortmounthouse society. "Well, I don't blame Clip," said Edgarda Lynchester. "Do you remember how he flirted with that painted Mrs. Acres the night of the ball? I would have consoled myself just as she did."

"But she must have done something extraor-

A Victim of Circumstances

dinary to induce him to break off the engagement," Mrs. Morgan objected. "A man doesn't do that for nothing."

"After all the duchess's training, it seems odd that her grandchildren haven't turned out better—to say nothing of the general," Mrs. Lynchester remarked, sagely. "I have always maintained myself that you can't expect anything else of people who are taught to consider themselves so far above common mortals."

Mr. Floyd darted in and out of the conservatory, calling the attention of his guests to the gradual unfolding of the petals; his efforts were vain. The unfolding of theories and speculations was of greater interest to the company. "You see, the plant is beginning to diffuse a delicate perfume," he urged.

"How very remarkable!—And do you mean to tell me, Mrs. Morgan, that your seamstress actually *saw* him kiss her?"

"These very managing people are apt to make blunders. I believe she thinks herself omnipotent," Mr. Morgan said, with unction. He had suffered in his day from the magnate's authority.

"Has he gone back to the sitting-room?—I hear, Mrs. Lynchester—(the girls can't hear me, can they? No, Henry, somebody *must* look at that miserable plant. Go talk to Mr. Floyd)—I hear that she has other views for Clip. I am told that Sidney Percival is quite taken with her."

"He always seemed to me much more devoted to Spriggy, but I don't believe he is a marrying man—Clara, would you mind telling Edgarda

A Botanical Evening

that her sash is untied?—they say he has an establishment!”

Clara came back and seated herself by her mother. “I wonder what there is about Clip that bowls men over like tenpins? She’s pretty, of course, but Spriggy is ever so much nicer.”

“Those very fascinating girls are usually the ones who don’t marry,” said Mrs. Lynchester. “We are enjoying this lovely sight so much, Mrs. Floyd! Wonderful plant, isn’t it? How unfortunate that Madam Trevor should miss seeing it, she is always so interested in gardening.”

It was at this moment that the magnate sailed into the room, followed by her granddaughters, both blooming and serene, Spriggy in an exquisite French dress, Clip in plain white, and more dazzling in her loveliness than the little assemblage had ever seen her. Percy, who had feared for the pleasure of the evening, beamed, reassured, and Mr. Berry hastened to the side of St. Elizabeth’s chief patroness. Young Mr. Morgan, regardless of the eyes of his mother and sister, proceeded to pay homage to the deserted beauty, and everybody talked about the snow and the local election.

As a matter of fact, the magnate was in no mood for festivities, of however mild a nature, and the sight of Percy, never a particularly gratifying one to her, was on this occasion as a red rag to a bull. She had disliked his mother all her life, and the two excellent women were never tired of disparaging each other. Mrs. Townshend regarded Madam Trevor as little short of a papist; Madam Trevor,

A Victim of Circumstances

from superior heights of ritualism, scorned Mrs. Townshend as a dissenter. Altogether, it was an especially unfortunate moment for Percy to select for his attempt to ingratiate himself with her, and to plainly intimate that he desired to enter her family; but being gifted with no more than the average perceptions of an enamoured young man, he failed to realize this fact until he had gone too far to beat a temporary retreat, and a sudden attack of the magnate routed him horse and foot. "On the twentieth of February Rose will be twenty-one, as you are doubtless aware," she observed, "after which I shall have no further control over her affairs. What she may do then I can't undertake to predict, but in the meantime I am safe in assuming that she won't find it advisable to enter into any agreement with you without my consent."

"If you would only tell me how I have offended you—if you would say what you want me to do—" he protested, in crucial embarrassment.

"I fear you wouldn't be convinced by my reasons, which I don't feel constrained to give you," said Madam Trevor, "and I am quite positive I shouldn't be convinced by yours, so there is an end of the matter. You need not send your uncle to talk to me, for my mind is fully made up, and it remains to be seen whether Rose is sufficiently obstinate to continue of one purpose for three months."

"I assure you I have never said a word to her," Percy protested, but with an involuntary and ill-timed triumph at the possibility which her remark implied.

A Botanical Evening

"Don't for a moment imagine that I feel confident of your success," said Madam Trevor. "I don't give myself the slightest uneasiness about the end of the matter, but, knowing young women as I do, I can see that you will receive a certain amount of encouragement, and I don't wish to be held responsible for any false hopes. I believe that as yet I retain some influence with my granddaughters."

Not ten minutes later Mrs. Floyd called her nephew into the sitting-room and left him alone with Spriggy, and in that sympathetic presence he shortly managed to blurt out the whole story of his hopes and his ill success. He said a great deal when the floodgates were opened, and became unexpectedly eloquent as he pleaded his own cause; and the beloved object listened with a certain gratification, for homage is sweet to a sore heart, and she was one who could never remain quite unresponsive to a proffered love, whether or not she cared for the lover. Another point which militated in Percy's favor was the high-handed manner in which her grandmother assumed the impossibility of rebellion among her subjects. A revolt at this domination was gradually strengthening in Miss Harcourt's soul, where lurked, perhaps, a trace of the same all-pervading spirit, and a desire to commit some act of overt rebellion was undermining the submissive habit of a lifetime. A sense of power stirred within her—an ability to do battle with the strongest—which undoubtedly moved her to say: "But I shouldn't change my mind. I am not that sort of a person. How can

A Victim of Circumstances

two people live together for years and know each other no better than that? If grandmamma persists in having such ideas about me, I am afraid I shall surprise her some day. Why, if I once promised to do a thing, all the relatives in the world couldn't move me an inch. I should die before I should give up my point."

"But it would be very painful to you to oppose her," said Percy.

"No more painful than to be opposed," she answered, with decision. "Of one thing I am certain: if I really loved a man, it would take more than grandmamma's disapproval to make me give him up. I should want to feel perfectly sure of myself, and then he might feel perfectly sure of me."

It cannot be denied that this language, while non-committal, was decidedly encouraging, and that Percy had unwittingly accomplished a grand *coup* when he repeated Madam Trevor's irritating remarks, without which he could hardly have succeeded in eliciting such unguarded frankness from the object of his affections. From the moment that the magnate's conduct towards him savored of persecution his star was in the ascendant, nor was it likely to wane so long as she continued to ill-treat him. All hurt things appealed to Spriggy, and the binding of wounds was a labor of love with her. While the botanical phenomenon unfolded slowly in the conservatory, and a mild refection was served to the company, his wooing progressed under the beaming smiles of Mrs. Floyd and the scornful indifference of Madam Trevor. She had

A Botanical Evening

promised to write to him—she thought his letters would be a comfort to her. She had promised to call him Percy and to send him her photograph. When Madam Trevor sent the girls home before leaving herself, Miss Harcourt fired her first gun. Standing beside her grandmother, cloaked for departure, she held out her hand, with her most engaging smile, and said, in perfectly audible tones, “Good-night, Percy!”

The magnate seemed deaf. She was enjoining Mrs. Floyd to visit her the following morning and learn what she was to say to Fortmounthouse at large regarding Roy's departure. An official report was advisable.

CHAPTER XXX

LES ABSENTS ONT TOUJOURS TORT

WHEN, on his return to town, Percival went to call on his uncle, he found Mrs. Augusta Townshend already there, soliciting a subscription for some pet charity, and explaining why Percy had not come, how his business had detained him, and why it was more laudable in *him* to spend his time in visits than in other people who had nothing in the world to do but run about and amuse themselves. She was a tall, spare woman, with a long, yellow face, and went about heavily swathed in crape. She wore eye-glasses without rims, and had a way of pursing up her mouth as if for fear of wasting an invaluable syllable. She inquired after Mrs. Percival, whom she considered frivolous, and desired to know, in an unanswerable manner, where General Trevor had obtained the money he had squandered on his ill-timed ball. After all, what could be expected of people who were all but papists? "And Percy tells me that you have joined another club," she said to her nephew, in a tone which indicated a climax of some sort. "How many does this make, pray?"

"Only seven," said Percival, meekly.

Les Absents Ont Toujours Tort

"My Percy," said Mrs. Townshend, "never belonged to but one club in his life, and that for business purposes."

"A great mistake!" her brother-in-law observed, who heartily wished her gone, since he was most anxious to sound Percival on a rumor which she had brought. "A man without a club is a mournful spectacle. He will be marrying one of these days, and then where can he go for comfort, if not to his club? And these political organizations have no atmosphere, no distinction. I was willing to do anything for Percy, and I'm afraid that when he reaches my age he will regret that he didn't grow old among his friends in the Union or the Fest."

Mrs. Townshend was fastening her sealskin. "I consider a young man better off at home," she said. "I trust this new club of yours won't interfere with your good resolutions, Sidney."

"Oh, nothing ever interferes with *them*," said Percival, cheerfully. "I keep them on tap."

"Now, what on earth does she mean?" he demanded of his uncle, when he had put the excellent woman into her carriage. Mr. Townshend was celebrating her departure with sherry and bitters, and glowed with satisfaction at this excellent opening.

"She tells me you have been turning over a new leaf," he remarked, with a chuckle. "She hears from Percy that you have forsaken your boon companions, that you are industrious, sober, frugal—in short, that you have suddenly sprouted all the virtues. I was naturally much gratified, as well as

A Victim of Circumstances

surprised, at learning of your reform from that particular source, but her closing remark explained everything. It seems you are thinking of settling yourself."

"I hope you didn't disappoint her in your comments on the news," said Percival, piously.

"I said I thought it was high time some of you were doing something of the sort," said his uncle, "but I suggested that Percy was the fittest sacrifice to lay upon the altar of Hymen. I also suggested that his attentions in the same quarter were quite as noticeable as yours."

"How like poor Percy to tell her that I was qualifying for matrimony," said Percival.

"Qualifying for Madam Trevor's grandson-in-law, *she* puts it," said Mr. Townshend.

"Either a good guess or her prophetic soul," said Percival. "I am sure Percy never told her that. He isn't as expansive about his private affairs as she fancies."

"Then you think *he* is another *soupirant*? Very sensible in him, I'm sure," Mr. Townshend conceded, "but I can't understand why he should tell his mother about *you*."

"He always does, if he can find anything at all creditable—or imagine it," said Percival. "He wants to prepossess her in my favor. It's awfully good in him, but she doesn't care, and neither do I."

"It is amazing that an all-wise Providence should permit excellence to appear in such an unpleasant guise," Mr. Townshend sighed. "She is possessed

Les Absents Ont Toujours Tort

of the seven deadly virtues. Your mother tells me you are writing something. I should be truly gratified to learn that it is literature, not journalism."

"It isn't newspaper work. I can't answer for its being literature," said Percival.

"Show it to me when you have it under way. You know I am always interested. As a young man I had a fancy for composition myself," said his uncle, retrospectively, "though my line was rather appreciative than creative. It was only for a little while that I felt the symptoms of the divine afflatus—a very little while, when I was young and in love."

"Good heavens! Are you accusing me of poetry?" Percival demanded, aghast. "I assure you I'm not guilty of that."

"I didn't know. You seem to be growing younger," said his uncle, "and all things are possible to a man in your condition."

"You believe her, then?"

"Unless you assure me to the contrary. After all, why shouldn't it be true? Only it seems a pity that one or the other of you should be doomed to disappointment. Why need you have both pitched upon the same Dulcinea?"

"We haven't," said Percival.

"I am an old man, with few months of life before me," Mr. Townshend observed, with pathos, "and I should be truly gratified and flattered if those whose welfare is nearest my heart would see fit to come to me frankly and say, 'Uncle Maturin, I am desirous of marrying Mlle. Une Telle. Does

A Victim of Circumstances

it meet with your approval?" You might find yourself, you know, in a more satisfactory position to address her family, and, with a far-sighted person, it would act in your favor."

"I didn't wish to be premature," said Percival. "I've only a fighting chance, and since you knew without my telling you, perhaps it is just as well that I didn't indulge in any confidences."

"I thought it was one of them," said Mr. Townshend, "but I could not be certain which. I hope you have considered the matter well. There is no better blood in the country, but at the same time we all know what Edward Trevor is—trying, my dear boy, most trying, even to his own people—and he will be getting retired one of these days and settling in New York. It is just as well to reflect on those things."

"I don't like to reflect," said Percival, frankly. "I'm sufficiently alarmed already."

"At the prospect of settling down?"

"At the prospect of not being allowed to settle down."

"Would you like me to speak to Madam Trevor?" his uncle inquired, much pleased at the confidence his usually uncommunicative nephew reposed in him.

"Thank you, no. Not at first. I've got to do it myself," said Percival.

"But afterwards? She may wish to know what I propose doing for you," said Mr. Townshend, who was loath to relinquish the idea of active participation in the negotiation. "To be sure, I have

Les Absents Ont Toujours Tort

not fully decided myself, but time presses, and I have only a brief season left to me. In any case, your aunt Emmeline will find herself provided with the wherewithal to purchase dress-improvers in the height of the fashion."

"They may not be in vogue by that time," said Percival, who was still incredulous.

Mr. Floyd, recalled to a bondage as yet unsweetened by any reconciling gift, came and went with tolerable frequency during these days of early winter, and Percy was most assiduous in his attentions to the invalid. It cannot be denied that Mr. Townshend found a malign pleasure in playing upon their hopes and fears, announcing himself better or worse as the fancy struck him, showing a touching affection for each in turn, which caused them to regard each other with secret suspicion. In the meantime he had really recuperated sufficiently to commit imprudences. Percival was too much preoccupied just then to notice the running that his cousins were making, or to derive, as they did, a chastened comfort from the memory of that compact, duly signed and sealed, and delivered into Miss Harcourt's keeping. In his absence his uncle sang his praises to the dismay of the other competitors, though when he came his reception was according to the whim of the moment.

Mr. Floyd was entertaining his relative one evening by a brisk and irritating discussion of the relative merits of old times and new, when Percy came in full of importance. He had just received a note from Spriggy, informing him of the general's

A Victim of Circumstances

sudden death at San Antonio, and of Madam Trevor's departure to bring him home. There had been grand services for him at the post, but there was to be a second funeral at Fortmounthouse before he was finally laid away in the place which he had done so much to enliven during his meteoric career.

"I'll bet the old lady is relieved," cried Mr. Floyd. "Mrs. Acres will grieve, and all those women, but I doubt if the family are deeply afflicted. Go? Of course I'll go! I wouldn't miss it for dollars. I know nothing more amusing than a funeral at Fortmounthouse."

"You have a most flippant way of speaking of serious subjects, and I am sure, if you knew how disagreeably it impressed people, you would try to cure yourself of it," said Percy, severely.

"Well, now, wasn't he an old rip?" Bobby demanded, triumphantly.

"He is dead, Bobby," said his cousin, reproachfully.

"Then let his tombstone lie about him. I sha'n't," cried Mr. Floyd. "When did you say they were going to plant him?"

"I beg of you!" Mr. Townshend protested. "Spare me a foretaste of the creditable sentiments you will display at *my* funeral. I compliment you on your taste in the choice of a subject of conversation in the presence of a person whose days are numbered. Such delicacy affects me strongly. You had better go for a walk."

A number of people went up to Fortmounthouse

Les Absents Ont Toujours Tort

to "plant the general," as Bobby elegantly phrased it, and followed the procession to his last resting-place. Madam Trevor was seen to shed a few tears, but the general impression seemed to be that she was at heart relieved. Mrs. Floyd had an attack, and was fortified with brandy and harts-horn while paying this last compliment to the general. No one else was inclined to be lachrymose, and, indeed, Spriggy and Jim grew quite lively on the way back to the house. Clip was with her grandmother, who talked to her about her mourning. A few neighbors and friends dropped in afterwards to condole with the family, and were received in the parlor by the magnate herself. It was a bright day. The curtains were already pulled up, and the river was plainly visible from the windows. Cake and port wine were passed, and Bobby gorged himself as usual. The customary condolences were offered tentatively and received with grim politeness. Young Jim stuffed his new black gloves into his pocket, and inquired with animation of Percival whether it was true that the conjurer at the Star Theatre rolled two rabbits into one while you watched him, and whether you were allowed to feel of the rabbits. The girls, in their deep mourning, behaved decorously, but showed no signs of grief. Percy was present, ignored by the magnate. Miss Harcourt informed him that her weeds were but temporary, as her grandmother had arranged for her return to Mrs. Collyer's the following week. He thought the whole affair a trifle unconventional, but would have died rather

A Victim of Circumstances

than voice his opinion, for he considered himself already identified with the Trevors. Mr. Floyd, however, had no such scruples. "It's the rummest funeral *I* ever saw!" he declared to his horrified parents, "and Roy never showed up, after all."

CHAPTER XXXI

MR. PERCIVAL SPECULATES HEAVILY IN CASTLES IN SPAIN

CHRISTMAS bade fair to be a sorry festival in Fortmounthouse that year. Always before the magnate's grandchildren had all been with her, but now Spriggy was directed to remain with her aunt, and Roy's name was not mentioned. Clip had helped to decorate the walls of the church with evergreens, and had been treated with nervous politeness by the other girls. They evidently regarded her as a species of curiosity. After service Mr. Berry came out, brimming over with jocularly, and was rather too cordial to her as he passed her in the vestibule. The day was fair and unseasonably mild, and she walked back from church, dreading the small dinner-table, the quiet, dreary afternoon, the lonely evening. What was a holiday without Spriggy? And what festivity could be expected at a board surrounded by empty places?

At the south gate there were fresh wheel tracks, deeper than those made by the pony-carriage, and under the porte-cochère stood the new-comer, waiting for her arrival. His face lighted up as her little black figure came hurrying towards him with

A Victim of Circumstances

hands outstretched. "Merry Christmas!" he said. "If I had been a little earlier, I should have met you at church."

"Oh, Sidney, how good of you to come, when I was feeling so homesick for Spriggy!" she cried. "You don't know how glad I am to see you."

"You see I am giving myself a little holiday treat before dining with a dreadful concourse of relations this evening," said Percival. "I thought it might be as well to lay in a stock of good-nature to start with, considering that Aunt Augusta is to be of the party."

"My Christmas won't be a failure, after all," said Clip. "See the lovely ring that Spriggy sent me!" She pulled off her left glove to show him her present, and he noticed that it was the only ring on her hand. The diamond solitaire was gone.

"I wanted to come most awfully. The fact is, I wanted to come before," Percival admitted, "but I was afraid that even my docility in swallowing herb tea wouldn't excuse it in Madam Trevor's eyes. It was Spriggy who told me I might venture it. Mother dragged me to the Patriarchs' the other night, and I saw her there. She's no end of a success, isn't she?"

"Yes, Mrs. Collyer wrote grandmamma that no girl in town was a greater favorite," said Clip, proudly. "Grandmamma thought there was no need for her keeping her mourning, and I was so glad, though, of course, I miss her awfully. Shall we go into the library? I think grandmamma is there."

"Wait just a minute longer. I haven't seen you yet.

Mr. Percival Speculates Heavily

I brought the dog-cart around," said Percival. "Do you suppose she would let you go for a little drive?"

"She generally doesn't," said Clip, seating herself on the steps. "What did you get for Christmas?"

"Candlesticks, and match-boxes, and canes, and that sort of thing," said Percival, vaguely. "A check from Uncle Maturin, two inkstands and a devotional book from Aunt Augusta, for which I must be duly thankful this evening. I sincerely trust I sha'n't forget it. My best one I haven't received yet."

"Do you know you are going to get it?"

"No, I don't. I haven't asked for it yet."

"I think you had better make haste, then. Who is going to give it to you?"

"Your grandmother. But I'm afraid she won't."

"You mean the drive? It's so long since any one has paid me a compliment that I don't know how to receive it gracefully, but you certainly do it very nicely. You have had a great deal of practice, haven't you?"

"I wish I hadn't had quite so much. I would rather have kept them all for you."

"The quantity might have been greater, but I'm sure the quality wouldn't have been as good," she said, laughing. "By the way, did Spriggy tell you that I am to go to town twice a week for my French and music? I am to spend Monday nights at the Van Rensselaers' and Thursdays at Mrs. Collyer's when there is nothing going on in the house."

"I'm very glad," said Percival. "It is hard for you here without Spriggy."

A Victim of Circumstances

"Yes, and I am only too glad to have something to do. I don't know why it is—I have always hated to be busy before—but now I am simply wretched if I am not occupied all the time."

"Poor child!" said Percival.

She flushed, and looked at him a little defiantly. "I was a little girl last winter; I'm not any longer," she said. "Don't think, though, that I'm going to mope and be silly."

Was she so much more than a little girl now? And how deeply had her recent experiences rooted themselves in that mysterious soul, half child, half woman, of which he could win only an occasional fleeting glimpse? It was her pride which repelled all suspicion of pity for Trevor's desertion, but what lay behind it? Had she cared for him, or had she submissively followed her grandmother's behest, believing in the magnate's infallibility and her own ignorance?—a well-meant interference, but a cruel one for all that, and one which Percival had no desire to see repeated in his own case. He was willing to ascribe all possible authority to the old lady, to defer to her in every way, but no passive bride should be delivered to him by family arrangement. If he could not make her love him, it would be a sacrilege to force himself upon her acceptance. Trevor had been quite right in asserting that his friend had "ideas." If Percival's experience with women had been a trifle unfortunate, it had at least given him that supreme reverence for female purity which a man less versed in the ways of the sex seldom cherishes in the same degree, lacking the

Mr. Percival Speculates Heavily

relief of contrast. In the library, where the magnate was writing letters, he strove, with inward trepidation, to make his point clear to her. He must be permitted to see Clip freely, and Clip must not be bothered. Madam Trevor was a shrewd old woman, and at heart a kind one. She permitted the drive, she made a civil comment on the huge box of violets which had just arrived for her granddaughter, and she invited him to return to luncheon. "It is hard for an old woman to admit that she has made a mistake," she said to him, in conclusion, "but I feel that I acted with undue haste in the matter once, and perhaps consulted expediency more than real congeniality. Fortunately, I believe no harm is done. She is so young, and, as you say, she can't be expected to know her own mind." An admission from Madam Trevor that a granddaughter of hers could have a mind of her own to know was so astonishing a development of the case that Percival involuntarily scanned her face for signs of breaking, but the cast of her small, high features was as forceful as ever, and, as he was helping Clip into the dog-cart he saw her on the side piazza, administering an exhortation to one of her pensioners which even the liberal Christmas-box that accompanied it could hardly be expected to mitigate.

They drove far out into the country, along little-frequented roads. Clip seemed quite happy and contented to be with him, and if her conversation was neither witty nor profound, he found it to his taste. There was a certain brilliancy in her manner

A Victim of Circumstances

of uttering the most commonplace remarks, and her voice was undeniably charming—fresh and sweet, with a little vibration underlying its tones which one could imagine thrilling into intensity when occasion offered. The sun shone on them all the way. Madam Trevor commented on the weather at luncheon, and quoted the gloomy proverb that a green Christmas makes a fat churchyard. She was more gracious than usual, but she looked straight across the unusually small table to where he sat, scrupulously avoiding with her eyes the empty spaces at the sides. They all stood on the steps as he finally drove off with a sprig of Clip's holly in his button-hole, and the magnate considerably waited until the sound of the wheels had died away before she adjusted her pince-nez and sentenced her granddaughter's flowers to a searching scrutiny.

"I didn't examine that pin when I saw it in the box," she said. "I thought it was simply one of those things one buys at the florist's, but I see it is a pearl, and a fine one. I will put it into my safe for the present."

Percival, in the train, tried to convince himself that he was a fool, that his anticipations were no more substantial than dreams, and that he was misled by her pretty courtesy and his own vanity, but the attempt ended, to his relief, in absolute failure. He told himself that he was intoxicated with a little hope—that she was too good for him—that it was impossible she should care for him; then he remembered her hasty denial of what he

Mr. Percival Speculates Heavily

had not dared to insinuate, her quick divination of his unspoken thought, and the brightness that had flashed into her face when she saw him, and he reflected, with truth, that a man's deserts have little to do with such matters, and that the best and most unselfish love of a lifetime is invariably lavished on an unworthy object. This latter observation did not occur to him with regard to his own affections. He had long since passed the stage where the consciousness of his love for her had made him impatient with his own folly. He was content now to drift with the tide of a passion no longer forbidden, and to take the consequences, whatever they might be. All the hardening influences of his past life—shame, disillusionments, regrets—had faded from his mind. His imagination supplied him with a hundred pictures of that home which had first taken tangible shape when he began to fancy Clip as its mistress. Delightful daydreams, conjured up by the tints of a pretty face, too young to be the exponent of more than transient emotions, the touch of a soft hand at parting, the sound of a voice with an undercurrent of possibilities! Experience cannot teach us to doubt you until we are too thoroughly toughened to profit by its lessons, or to mind a few scratches more or less on our well-seasoned cuticles. It is only by the loss of everything, even the possibility of great suffering, that we learn to avoid pain, and Percival, still retaining a fine faculty for emotion, prepared to abuse it, for all the world like other people.

CHAPTER XXXII

A QUIET HOUR

"**A**RE they the trappings of woe," Mr. Floyd demanded, "or is it only because they are becoming?"

The rose-shaded candlesticks on Mrs. Collyer's tea-table were diffusing an enchanting half-light, and the last caller had departed—the last, that is, save one, who, with a sigh of contentment, settled himself in a wicker chair for a long-sought and hardly won tête-à-tête. Miss Harcourt's aunt also had departed for a rejuvenating nap, and the coast was clear. "What a mercy it is that they have all gone!" he exclaimed. "It isn't often I get a quiet hour with the most popular girl of the season."

"Why this yearning for quiet? It isn't at all like you," said Spriggy. "You used to say you preferred to trot in a crowd."

"That is when I have nothing on my mind," Mr. Floyd answered, with a sigh. "But you don't answer my question. When a girl wears black and white flounces and fuzzy dangles, and silver buckles on her shoes, is it because she mourns at odd minutes for her uncle Edward, or is it only for her sins?"

A Quiet Hour

"Have some chocolate? It is very bad for you at this hour, and will spoil your appetite for dinner. Two lumps? Yes, I remember. There is a little round green cake for you. Afterwards I will give you one of auntie's soda-mint tablets."

"Do you remember the old woman on the Albany road who used to say, 'Let your victuals stop your mouth'? It is more civil the way you put it, but it amounts to the same thing," Mr. Floyd observed. "It seems to me that you never reply to a question nowadays, but always give me an evasive answer."

"Did you really ask me anything? I'm not really in mourning, as you know. I suppose it must be vanity. Anything else, Bobby?"

"You know very well I didn't mean that. I was inquiring about Roy. Haven't you honestly heard anything about him?"

"Not a word."

"Well, I have."

"Where is he?"

"In Washington. I've seen him. I didn't intend going there," Mr. Floyd admitted, "but somehow I was overpersuaded, and Walter Smith and all the other fellows were going, so I went, too. And while I was gone Uncle Maturin took it into his head to send for me, and of course I wasn't on hand, and he said nasty, mean things about me to Percy. Just my luck! Well, as I was saying, I saw Roy, and I saw the girl."

"What girl?" Spriggy inquired.

"The one he's devoted to now. It's not like him to care for girls—I'm sure he never used to look

A Victim of Circumstances

at 'em—but this one is engaged, so maybe that's her attraction. Anyhow, she's not very pretty, and she's going to marry the man who went to Arizona after rocks."

"Oh, dear me, Bobby, what *do* you mean? What rocks? I never heard of such a person. Is he really devoted to her?"

"I should say so. He is there all day. They go for country walks together. Yes, it's as bad as that!" cried Mr. Floyd. "And when *Roy* takes country walks, it must be serious."

"How can it be, if she is going to marry the rock man?"

"That's an intelligent question from *you*!" Mr. Floyd exclaimed, scornfully. "I *have* heard of engagements being broken before now. If Roy has once got the habit of paying serious attention to a girl, it's all up with him. Besides, he's not himself. He's demoralized. We were all demoralized by that good-for-nothing Courtenay."

"Now, Bobby, that is too bad of you. You know that he was as nice as possible until he got in with that fast set at Newport, and who introduced him to them? I always blamed you a little for that."

"Of course you did. Everybody always blames me for everything. If the sky were to fall, I'd be held responsible for it. But I must say," he observed, bitterly, "I didn't expect this from *you*."

"Now, Bobby, don't be unreasonable. Of course, poor Mr. Courtenay made us all a great deal of trouble, and I can't excuse what he did finally," said Spriggy, "but I do feel that he was, in the

A Quiet Hour

beginning, the victim of circumstances. He was quite nice as long as the rest of you were nice too, and when everything began to be at sixes and sevens, he simply followed the general example."

"I didn't do a thing," Mr. Floyd protested, indignantly. "I was just living as I had always lived. Blaming me! as though I had anything to do with it! But I know. Somebody has been talking to you, and no need to tell me who it is, either. You never confide in me any more. By Jove! am I a rag-picker or a post?"

"I would tell you things very often, but you know I can't betray what has been told me in confidence," said Spriggy, soothingly.

Mr. Floyd remained unappeased. "I make no promises," he said, loftily. "I may not be as infernally close-mouthed as Sid. I may occasionally talk about something besides the weather. Oh no, don't confide in me by any means! It isn't safe."

"What did you expect me to tell you?" Spriggy inquired, quite distressed at his indignation. "I don't know a thing about Roy, really I don't."

"You know about yourself, I suppose," the angry gentleman hazarded. "Are you going to mention it, or aren't you?"

"Well, answer my questions, and perhaps I'll answer yours," said Miss Harcourt, cautiously. "Are you provoked because I didn't give you full details of what happened after you went to town? Grandmamma told your mother all that I can tell you. Do you want to know about Clip? She comes to town twice a week for her music and French,

A Victim of Circumstances

and grandmamma is going to bring her out next winter."

"Maybe I know more about Clip than you do," said Mr. Floyd. "Maybe I can tell you that she's staying at the Percivals' this minute. As for Sidney, he's over head and ears—never saw a worse case in my life. But I suppose I'm not to mention it. Why, he stays at home evenings! For a week, to my certain knowledge, she's been there, and not once have I seen him at the club. I thought he was sick, and went 'round to look him up, but I found it was only a bad attack of spoons and spasms. So the old—Mrs. Trevor approves? Well, Sid's not such a bad catch now, and may be a better one, though there's no telling."

"How is your uncle?" Spriggy inquired, with malice aforethought.

"Oh, he's rather worse," said Mr. Floyd, cheerfully, "and Sid is neglecting him shamefully. However, I sha'n't grumble. The less he comes, the more I'm valued."

"Do you still want me to keep that ridiculous paper you left with me?" Spriggy asked. "I have it in my little safe, but it seems rather silly for me to take charge of it."

"It had better be in the hands of a person whom it doesn't concern," Mr. Floyd replied, adding darkly the next moment, "though it *may* concern you, too."

Spriggy colored a little, under his pointed scrutiny. "I don't like to take the responsibility of such a terribly important document," she said.

"Oh, you hold on to it," he urged, "and which-

A Quiet Hour

ever way the cat jumps, *you're* all right. I suppose Percy thinks that I don't stand the ghost of a show?"

"Percy always speaks far more kindly of you than you speak of him," said Spriggy. "Do you think it's quite safe for you to count your chickens so openly? I believe that Mr. Townshend will divide evenly—when the time comes."

"My good girl, you're wrong. He has always said distinctly that the one thing he will not do is to cut up the fortune. The bulk of it must go together. Of course, Percy has the name," Mr. Floyd conceded, "and I don't deny that Sidney takes an interest in his stupid bric-à-brac; but when you come to somebody who will carry down the traditions of the family as a society man, as a host, all that sort of thing, any person of sense would naturally look to me. I'm the only one with any real taste for entertaining—the only one with any kind of exclusiveness. Sidney would consort with a crossing-sweeper if he happened to be amusing, and Percy would snub the Prince of Wales if he didn't consider him respectable, but it takes *me* to steer between the two. And Uncle Maturin is no fool. He's beginning to realize who's likely to be a credit to him, and it's high time."

"Well, I'm sure it's very nice to be appreciated," said Spriggy. "Did you know that you were slopping your chocolate?"

There was a cause for Mr. Floyd's misadventure, for at this moment his cousin Percy entered the room unannounced, and made himself quite at

A Victim of Circumstances

home at the tea-table. His call was brief, for he expected to see Miss Harcourt at the opera that evening, and Mr. Floyd sat him out with fell determination. When he had departed, with an ease of manner which greatly irritated the lively gentleman, Spriggy urged more cakes on her remaining visitor, and plied him with small-talk, but he was not thus to be balked of speaking his mind. "Does he come here like this?" he demanded, disapprovingly. "Walking in as if he owned the earth, while *I send up my card!* What do you suppose your grandmother would say if she knew it?"

"She does know it," said Spriggy, with a set of her chin that meant business. In this matter it must be owned that Madam Trevor had been unwise, and by her opposition to the excellent young man had endowed him with a fictitious interest which his unaided attractions would have been powerless to evoke. She had even insinuated that her granddaughter would never dare to make her choice against the wishes of her family. Now "dare" was an ill word to fling in Miss Harcourt's teeth.

"Of course, I know he's as good as gold, and all that sort of thing," Mr. Floyd admitted, in a tone that was rather disparaging than otherwise, "and you might think the old lady would fancy a prig, but somehow she doesn't. And I never thought that *you* would. But that's the way with girls. Let a man show 'em that he's in love with them, and they are no more capable of judging anything about him than they are of picking out a decent

A Quiet Hour

cigar. He may be a rogue or an ass—it's all one, so long as he's spoons on them."

"Since Percy is neither—" she began, but he interrupted her promptly.

"Have you forgotten what a jack he made of himself that day at Fortmounthouse? Lord! I never saw such a gaby."

Spriggy, however, did not share this view of the matter. "I don't see why it was any more absurd in him than it would have been in you," she said. "You have a very disagreeable way of talking about people. You shouldn't say such things, even if you don't mean them."

"Oh, of course! Pitch into me. If I say anything at all, it's sure to be wrong. I sha'n't open my mouth again this afternoon except to put cake into it. Go ahead. Tell me you're in love with him and that you think he's perfect. Oh, I know girls! They're all alike. Do everything you can for 'em, and they'll turn around and abuse you and marry somebody else. But just let me remind you that, if I hadn't showed you your own mind about that fellow Courtenay, you wouldn't be raving to me about Percy to-day."

"Perhaps this is your idea of making yourself entertaining," said Spriggy. "It isn't mine."

"Oh, yes, of course. I can't say a word. I suppose if I were worth four or five millions it would be different."

"Nonsense!"

"I know, I know," cried Mr. Floyd, almost tearfully. "It's everybody but me!"

A Victim of Circumstances

"Oh, Bobby, you know I'm *very* fond of you."

Mr. Floyd hated nothing so much as to have her tell him she was fond of him in that tone. He rose and set down his cup. The butler announced "Mr. Percival," and he sat down again.

"Don't be afraid that I'm going to stay," said Percival. "I am only the emissary of Uncle Maturin. He wants us all to lunch with him while Clip is in town, and he asked me to find out what days you had free next week."

Mr. Floyd took another cake. "I didn't see you at the Brents'," he observed.

Spriggy was consulting her tablets, which hung from her chatelaine. "Would Tuesday do?"

"If it isn't the day somebody is going to be married."

"You mean Douglas Winchester. That's Wednesday," said Mr. Floyd, rather severely. "*The* wedding of the season—I should think you might remember it, even if you *are* studying French verbs. That's what they were doing, Spriggy—sitting on the rug in front of the fire in Aunt Louise's morning-room, and saying 'That I should have loved—That thou shouldst have loved!' After all I've had to hear from Uncle Maturin about your Parisian French, I must say I was a trifle surprised. However, circumstances alter cases."

"Poor Clip! Those verbs are such stuff, anyhow," said Spriggy. "I'm sure, *I* never use the subjunctive; I just go ahead and talk, and people always seem to understand me well enough. Tuesday, then, Sidney."

A Quiet Hour

"You will receive a very beautiful note from Uncle Maturin himself with further particulars, now that you have so kindly fixed the date," said Percival.

"You see," said Mr. Floyd, when he had gone, "the family is entertaining her. It's gone as far as that. And it strikes me that you are in it, too. Come, out with it! I hate shilly-shallying. Do you intend to marry Percy?"

"Well, yes," said Spriggy, "I do. But you must not say a word about it yet. You know grandmamma—"

"I might have known it," he cried, dismally. "I've seen it coming for months. I suppose you think he's a brilliant *parti*, now don't you?"

"I have promised to marry him. What can it matter why? Since it offends you so to hear me speak well of him, I won't trouble you with my reasons," said Miss Harcourt, with dignity.

"As long ago as last summer I saw that everything was going to the deuce," he proceeded, gloomily. "There are some people in this world who have a faculty for making trouble and setting everybody else by the ears, and we had two of them at Fortmounthouse last summer. Not that I want to speak ill of the dead, or the absent," he added, nobly.

"Bobby, Bobby, you made some of the trouble yourself," said Spriggy, a trifle severely.

"I make trouble? My good girl, you're crazy. It's preposterous to say such a thing. If ever there *was* a person who spent his life in trying to do good to other people, that person is the one you

A Victim of Circumstances

are traducing at this moment, by Jove! Lord, how ungrateful people are! They never seem to consider any one but themselves, and if you try to help 'em, to get them out of a scrape, or put a flea in their ear, damn it all, they regard it as interference! I'll be hanged if I ever put myself out for anybody again, since this is all the thanks I get."

"There, don't fly into such a rage. You will break something, and, besides, it's bad for you," said Spriggy. "I have answered your question, and I really can't allow you to swear at me, you know."

"Answered my question? Yes; worse luck!" cried Mr. Floyd. "Does Clip know it?"

"Yes."

"Can I tell anybody?"

"I'll never forgive you if you do."

"Not even Sid? He's as close as an oyster."

"I will tell him myself. Remember, I am trusting you, and if you don't keep it a dead secret, I will never tell you anything again as long as I live."

"Oh, well, I don't think I care to talk confidentially to Sidney, anyhow," said Mr. Floyd. "I made a very simple little remark to him about Clip—just to give him a chance to tell me what he ought to—and, good heavens, he nearly took my head off!"

"Did he say much to you?" she inquired.

"No," said Mr. Floyd, with concentrated bitterness, "he didn't say *much*. Well, I must be going. I suppose I shall be asked on Tuesday, if it's a family

A Quiet Hour

affair. He depends on me a good deal in social matters. You see for yourself how much good Sidney is. I suppose I mustn't say a word about Percy—lucky dog!"

He was very cross and snappish at dinner, contradicting his uncle and endangering his prospects. As for Spriggy, she cried a little while she was dressing for the opera. Her "quiet hour" had been a trifle trying.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

MR. TOWNSHEND had unlocked his famous collection of miniatures and was pointing out their beauties to his young guests. Luncheon was over, the gentlemen had smoked, the ladies had flitted about the old-fashioned house, examining the curiosities, looking out from the library windows into the garden, which in summer was full of tall, climbing rose-bushes, fuchsias, and bleeding-hearts, and where now little patches of snow lay melting in the February sun. Clip had sat on the brocaded sofa and caught her hair in the carved gilt back, so that Percival's help was needed to disentangle it, and she had played on the piano, and sung one of her new songs, very timidly, but with great applause. Now she hovered over the portraits of dead or faded beauties, listening to Mr. Townshend's comments with a pretty deference that charmed him. Her grandmother's miniature was among them—the magnate at nineteen, with long ringlets and an India muslin scarf. "A copy from one belonging to her sister—you may have seen it. My dear, I remember your grandmother as a young and very beautiful woman. For many

A Declaration of Independence

years I have maintained that women are not as beautiful nowadays as they used to be, but since I have seen you I have renewed my youth. Does Madam Trevor ever speak to you of her little sister Mary? You are like her. She is the only one of whom I have no picture to show—no story to tell." The old gentleman's voice trembled. The most chronic *poseurs* have their moments of sincerity, and the old romance, buried under years of sentimentality, struck a true and vital chord in his heart. He was unable, however, to refrain from fine language. "Ah, well," he said, "one is young but once, and that only for a little while. I can't grudge that boy his good fortune, but I wish I could be in his place for an hour before I leave it all—just to feel the spring in my blood once more, to hear it singing in my heart as it sings in his! Well, at least I can know that those who come after me are more fortunate than I have been, and that there won't be another lonely old bachelor in the family."

His gaze rested paternally on Percival, who was sitting with Spriggy in the corner under the Baker portrait of Mrs. Percival and Mrs. Floyd, much flounced, against a velvet curtain, with a fine landscape in the background. Spriggy was all animation. Percy had been unable to come to the luncheon, but hoped to look in later in the afternoon and escort her to several teas. Bobby had treated her with an attempt at distant civility which amused and provoked her. Now he held aloof, saying to himself, "I'll give her a chance to tell him, confound it!"

A Victim of Circumstances

She availed herself of the opportunity thus generously proffered, and consulted Percival, with outward calm and bravely stifled heartache, on the best course to pursue if her grandmother still persisted in her obduracy. He was her intimate friend—he had given her his confidence. It was only proper that she should tell him. He was interested, cordial, sympathetic. He felt quite sure that Madam Trevor would relent. He spoke to her of his own plans and hopes, unreservedly, as he had never spoken before, while Mr. Floyd glowered on them, and the old gentleman radiated general approval. Percy arrived, and the party went its several ways, Percival and Clip taking a stroll through the leafless park, which lay quite out of their way. She lectured him for not showing himself more attentive to such a dear old gentleman, and he took it with beautiful meekness, and promised to go there oftener, “not to please me, but because you know it’s right.” “And he is so anxious to see your book! If you would read him a little, just as you did for me?” She had listened charmingly to the extracts from the manuscript which he had given her, and which she did not understand in the least, and, though it seemed absurd to his calmer judgment, Percival found her presence an intellectual stimulus. It had been a perfect day, and afterwards the house and the square seemed full of her presence. The sun always shone where she had been.

It was not long after this that Percy called upon his cousin (by appointment), in the greatest distress,

A Declaration of Independence

with a harrowing account of Madam Trevor's latest injustice. The magnate, it appeared, had summoned Miss Harcourt to Fortmounthouse on the eve of a particularly important dinner given in her honor, and, in the arbitrary manner which characterized her proceedings, had declined to countenance the engagement, or even to admit its existence. "She says that Rose may do as she pleases, but that she will not acknowledge my pretensions," the luckless suitor announced, "and no wedding-cards shall be sent out in her name, and she will not be present at the ceremony, or receive us afterwards. I don't see what I'm to do. It is scandalous to make a runaway match. We couldn't think of such a thing. She won't change her mind, and what I particularly dread is that the pressure will be too great, and that Rose will change hers. I have tried to make her like me, but it is evidently an antipathy. Rose told her that, for the sake of appearances, it would be better to act as if she tolerated me, but she said that, if we cared to avoid unpleasant comment, it lay entirely in our own power to do so. She wants to throw all the responsibility on us, whatever happens. I am at my wits' end. We cannot have a scandal. Don't think that I wish to involve you in this unfortunate affair. I realize that you have every reason for wishing to stand well with her, and I won't mention your name. Only tell me what you think I ought to do."

It was unfortunate that Mr. Floyd should have chosen that particular moment to walk unannounced into the library where Percy was unburdening his

A Victim of Circumstances

woes, and to give his advice unsolicited. "The old woman's a bad one to buck up against," he said; "but if I were lucky enough to be in your shoes, I wouldn't give up that girl for fear of all the old harpies in Christendom. She might curse me with bell and book, by Jove, but she shouldn't make me back down. But you're so lily-livered that I suppose you'll let her go rather than make a scandal."

"What does Spriggy say herself?" Percival inquired.

"She has her grandmother's spirit. She is very indignant. So is Mrs. Collyer. She says she will be of age in February," said Percy.

"And she's not the girl to go back on you when once she's given her word," Mr. Floyd declared. "Bless you, though, she's afraid of the old woman, as you all are but me, every mother's son of you. She'll be bold as brass for a time, but, let Madam Trevor nag at her for a month or so, and where will you be with your shilly-shallying? Strike while the iron is hot, or you'll lose the finest girl in the country, and you'll deserve it, too."

"Sidney, surely *you* wouldn't advise me to suggest such a thing to her?" Percy demanded, accusingly.

"I don't want to get myself disliked," said Percival, "but I don't see why it need be so shocking. Spriggy has other relations. It needn't necessarily be under the rose if one member of the family declines to appear at the ceremony."

"If you don't look out, you'll offend her yourself," said Bobby.

A Declaration of Independence

"I know it," said Percival.

"It would be a deuced good lesson for the duchess to find that the earth can turn without her," Mr. Floyd supplemented. "It's very disinterested in me to advise you, for we shall all be in her black-books when it's found out; but, if I were in your place, I'd elope, if need be, and be married at City Hall, rather than have my plans upset by an old tyrant like that."

So strenuous were Mr. Floyd's counsels, and so faint the discouragement which Percival threw upon them, that poor Percy found his dread of gossip quite overshadowed by the greater dread of losing Spriggy through his own lack of decision.

"You can't expect *her* to urge it," cried his cousin, scornfully, incredulous of the effect of his words. "A girl can't suggest that sort of thing, you know. But you're so chicken-hearted that I suppose you're more afraid of what Mrs. Winchester will say than you are of being thrown over. In my opinion, all the dowagers in town will be enchanted to see somebody with the courage to stand up to Madam Trevor, even if they don't turn out for the wedding."

"The worst feature of all is that I shall be obliged to go to London in March," Percy confessed. "It's a matter of business, and one that can't be deferred any longer."

"Then that finishes it!" cried Mr. Floyd. "It'll be Lent. Spriggy will be back in Fortmounthouse under the old woman's thumb. You won't be on hand to brace her up, and there will be church a dozen times a day, and general gloom, and long

A Victim of Circumstances

sermons from that ass Berry on your duty to your family, preached to order to gratify the duchess, and you may just as well make up your mind that when you come back you will be sent about your business with some fine speech about the beauty of sacrifice. I know girls!"

Percy groaned. It seemed to him that there was only too much foundation of probability in his cousin's predictions.

Percival discussed the matter with Clip later in the evening, in the dimly lighted reception-room at Mrs. Van Rensselaer's. No one else was at home, and the French exercises and music were over for the day. The young person was wearing a white frock with black ribbons, and a huge bunch of violets, of which she had always a plentiful supply these days. She looked very grave at his intelligence. "Grandmamma doesn't know Spriggy," she said.

"Then you think that her refusal will make no difference?"

"It makes all the difference in the world. Spriggy can't bear to see any one ill-treated. At first she liked him no better nor worse than a dozen other men, but now it's different, and grandmamma herself has done it. And if it comes to the point," Miss Trevor remarked, "I think Spriggy can get the better of grandmamma."

"I wonder you dare to utter such rank heresy," said Percival. "But perhaps you are a match for her yourself."

"I? Oh no! Besides, I am not independent, as Spriggy is."

A Declaration of Independence

"Would you do anything she told you to, whether you liked it or not?"

"I generally have," said Clip.

"But you mustn't. You must please yourself—if it is important."

"I should never dare do what Spriggy will do."

"Then you really think she will?"

"I am afraid so," said Clip. "Don't think I mean anything against him—I'm sure he's very nice. But it will be terrible."

"Mrs. Trevor can't blame you for it."

"She will be so gloomy!" sighed Clip. "And so astonished!"

Astonished the magnate certainly was when, after much futile argument and correspondence, she received her granddaughter's wedding-cards, issued by Mr. and Mrs. Collyer, a direct challenge to her sovereign authority, hitherto unquestioned. The entire Trevor, Van Rensselaer, and Townshend connection, having thrown down the gauntlet, waited with bated breath for the awful consequences, and thanked fortune that they did not live in Fort-mounthouse. It was agreed that Madam Trevor had gone too far; nevertheless, the cousins quaked inwardly while attending the very smart wedding by means of which, on Shrove Tuesday, Miss Harcourt celebrated her majority and her independence. There were no bridesmaids, as Clip was not allowed to officiate or to be present, though her grandmother permitted her to remain at Mrs. Percival's during the week on the understanding that she was not to appear at the ceremony. Mr. Floyd,

A Victim of Circumstances

who had never imagined the bridegroom capable of such decision, concealed some bitterness under an overweening importance, and Percival, having laid the case before the magnate, acted as best man. Gossip was rife, and every one was enchanted that the decorous Percy should carry off a bride in the face of such formidable opposition. It lent him a new humanity, and warmed people's hearts to his hitherto forbidding excellence. Even Mr. Townshend gushed over him and bestowed some fine diamonds upon his new niece. The bridegroom was pale and nervous; the bride determined, and with a brilliant color. Mr. Floyd, who fancied himself *au fait* with all the arrangements, hurled old shoes at them as they drove off, and would have been much amazed to learn that their destination was not the Pennsylvania Ferry, and that a doleful little person who was looking wistful and wet-eyed from Mrs. Percival's window saw a carriage draw up at the curb, and a trim young woman in gray rush up the steps, followed at a more dignified pace by a tall young man, now relieved and beaming; and in a moment the two cousins were in each other's arms, laughing and crying at once, regardless of grand-maternal prohibition.

"Hurry and put on your things," said the new Mrs. Townshend. "Sidney is coming with a cab, and he's going to take you down to see us off. We hardly feel that we're truly married without you."

The quartet crossed the ferry together and parted only on board the "Royal Blue," where, sad

A Declaration of Independence

to say, both ladies shed tears in the seclusion of the compartment, and where Percival kissed his new cousin good-bye. Clip's grief broke out afresh in the cab, and she declared that, for her own part, she could never marry without grandmamma's consent, no matter how desperately she might love anybody. "Do you think you *could* love him very desperately?" Percival asked, as she dried her eyes with an absurd little square of cambric, already quite damp from the parting. "I believe you have shed more tears over Spriggy's troubles than you have over your own."

"I haven't had so many of my own," she said, with a little final sob. "You mustn't think I have had a hard time. Oh, I *hope* she will be happy!"

Percival tucked the robe around her, and watched the gold of her hair fade into the February twilight. It must be confessed that he was not thinking of Spriggy.

CHAPTER XXXIV

PROVES THE VALUE OF AN IMPORTANT DOCUMENT

MRS. AUGUSTA TOWNSHEND—"old Mrs. Townshend," as she had now become—announced herself ready to meet Madam Trevor in a Christian spirit, but the magnate ignored the message when it was delivered to her, with fear and trembling, by Mrs. Floyd. She also ignored the newly married couple, and visited their sins upon cousins and grandnieces. Public amazement was great that the Percival family escaped unscathed, though, as Mr. Floyd remarked, "She isn't going to blunder about Clip a second time." She had now but two grandchildren left to rule, and on these she based her remaining hopes. They may have benefited by her undivided attention, but it is doubtful whether they enjoyed it.

Mr. Townshend, who had apparently taken a new lease of life, and showed his rejuvenated countenance with great regularity at the opera, now found a new source of gratification in the instant success of Percival's little book. "It is really literature," he announced to every one. "I didn't know the boy was capable of it." Bobby, who scorned

Value of an Important Document

the profession of letters and all who embraced it, was intensely disgusted at this praise. "He does nothing but gloat over that silly little red thing, as though it were of the slightest importance!" he grumbled. "Anybody could have written it—I could myself, if I didn't despise authors with all my heart. And who wants to read a lot of stupid stuff about painting, and books, and all that? For my part, I couldn't get through it." In these dark days the obscured favorite derived his chief consolation from the memory of that agreement which Spriggy still kept for him, and in his knowledge of his uncle's fickle temperament. He strove to shine socially, to be indispensable to matrons of prominence, to dazzle Mr. Townshend with his qualifications for a drawing-room arbiter, pointing out the fact that Percival was leading the life of a hermit, and cared less and less for society. The old gentleman, when he noticed him at all, was highly complimentary to his talents. No one could turn a sentence more gracefully than he, and the perfect knowledge that his uncle could be at times a consummate hypocrite failed to illuminate Mr. Floyd as to the special occasions on which this faculty was exercised.

Mr. and Mrs. Percy had sailed for Liverpool, leaving their plans in a rather chaotic state, and Percy's mother ministered to her brother-in-law, much against his will, fearing the undue influence of both nephews in Percy's absence. She alone distrusted Mr. Townshend's unflagging energy and good spirits, and bothered him considerably about

A Victim of Circumstances

his soul. It was with difficulty that he could escape from her attentions and flee to Mrs. Percival, who, secure in the conviction that she was a good churchwoman, insinuated no unsettling doubts as to the final destination of so near a relative. "I consider myself in no jeopardy," he assured his tormentor. "My life hasn't been blameless, but at least there have been no scandals in it, and I have done nothing that I need blush to have my nephews know. I've encouraged American art, I've paid my debts, and I thank Heaven I've never given a cent to foreign missions. I'm sorry to see you so exercised on my behalf, Augusta. If you would worry no more about my ultimate fate than I do, you might save yourself great distress, and me considerable weariness of spirit."

They had all been dining with the old gentleman—Mrs. Percival, Sidney, and Clip—and had gone later on to a subscription concert in a studio which he was most anxious to hear. On their return he insisted that they should remain to a little supper. He ordered his chafing-dish, and proceeded to cook terrapin himself after his famous recipe, discoursing over the alcohol lamp of the *divas* of his youth, singing snatches of old arias, and showing himself a most lively and delightful companion. "I have tried to be a good American," he said, finally, "and I hope that you will be one, too, my boy. I want to feel that you are going to use your talents and your influence at home—not only in this country, but here in New York. It has been good enough for your people these two hundred years, and I hope

Value of an Important Document

it will be good enough for you. I should like you to give me an assurance that you will live your life here, and hold to the same principles that I have always held. You know my views. I leave you with a free foot, but you'll keep to the old road, out of kindness for an old fellow who loved it and you."

Percival was touched in spite of himself, and took the hand his uncle stretched out to him as a pledge of the future. "I love New York myself," he said. "I have had my happiest days here, and I hope for still happier to come."

"I owe a debt of gratitude to you, my dear," Mr. Townshend said, turning to Clip, "for arousing this boy's ambition, and making him believe in himself. I always knew that he was capable of better things than he had ever given evidence of, but at one time I own I had my doubts as to his making any good use of his abilities. I know him better now, and I'm proud of him." He was putting her cloak around her shoulders as he spoke, while Percival performed the same office for his mother. "Will you kiss an old man good-night?—God bless you, my dear!" said the old gentleman.

It was not only good-night, but good-bye. Two days later Mrs. Augusta Townshend's prophecies were fulfilled, and another well-known figure had vanished forever from the life of the city he had loved so well.

It was to a house as silent as the one he had just quitted that Percival returned after performing the poor last services that regret can render to the dead

A Victim of Circumstances

—a house which had never been more than a casual lodging to him, the convenient spray on which he had perched with those birds of passage, his parents, in the intervals between their flights. Of those parents one was proving more satisfactory as a background than he had ever showed himself as a father, and the other, a charming woman whom he admired, had been little more than a gracious fleeting vision in his childhood, and fortunately had too much tact to attempt at this late day to cross the barrier of the man's reserve. The nearest approach to an anchorage which he had found in his wanderings was the old house on the Square, august now from the silent presence of its master. It was with a real, if perfectly consolable, grief that Percival mourned for the agreeable old humbug who had filled so large a place in his life, who, after all, was not a man to evade his word, or to be guilty of a mean action. His histrionics had always been inspired by a high-flown ideal, perhaps too lofty for realization in the prosaic world he lived in; and his nephew, who stood committed to a line of conduct in accordance with these principles, was so lost in the delights of his own castle-building that he perceived nothing impracticable in the conditional pledge he had given. In every one of these unsubstantial edifices one image sat enthroned, and he knelt before it in spirit, pouring out the best of his nature in libations to her sweetness, her purity, that intangible something which made her the one woman in the world for him. He hardly needed to endue her with those fine, impossible

Value of an Important Document

qualities with which we drape the peerless lay-figures of our imaginations; her very faults were the kind that men make virtues of. Places were dear to him only as they were full of hints of her occupancy. It was this memory of her presence in the past happy weeks that quickened his steps towards the library, and he felt no surprise at seeing her dawn out of the darkness, across the silent room, holding out her hands to him. He raised the little, kind, welcoming hands to his lips and held them there. For the first time in his life he felt that he had in truth come home.

The reading of Mr. Townshend's will was delayed until Percy could return, and during the interval Mr. Floyd's suspense affected his temper and spirits, while his mother, installed at her sister's, made liberal purchases of mourning and wept with the chastened sorrow of a beneficiary. When the steamer finally arrived, and a family conclave was assembled, he entered clad from head to foot in the sable habiliments of woe, and with his precious document in his hand. "I've just escaped from the reporters," he said, importantly. "Of course, I gave them no particulars."

"I should hope not," said Percy, who was also feeling the strain. "One needn't be so premature."

"Well, of course, this paper holds good in any case," Mr. Floyd reminded both his cousins. He twirled it nervously during the reading of the will, and when those concerned dispersed to their respective abodes he accompanied the Percivals home,

A Victim of Circumstances

barely waiting until he had crossed the threshold to burst forth into a torrent of rage and indignation. "A beggarly legacy in return for all my sacrifices and attention!" he cried to any one who would listen. "Parsimonious, double-faced old fox! You needn't remind me that Percy has the same. Hasn't he got a rich wife and a good business? And is half of *his* money left him in trust? *In trust!* Good heavens, my blood boils when I think of it—as though I couldn't be trusted to make something out of my wretched little pittance when I got my hands on it! I don't care a hang if he *is* dead, mother. I'm not kicking about what he's left you or Aunt Louise, but I do say it's outrageous to lavish fortunes on those who have 'em already, and, if it wasn't for that devilish paper, I'd fight to the last gasp. A legacy to Roy, by Jove! It's enough to make a man turn socialist. But I could stand even that and not complain if it weren't for the shocking injustice of it all. Here I worked and slaved to please him, year in and year out, gave up my own engagements to suit his whims, pretended to take an interest in his damned old pictures, read aloud to him by the hour, made a perfect pack-horse of myself, and here he leaves everything to a fellow who never went near him unless he happened to feel like it, and makes him sole executor into the bargain. It's undue influence, that's what it is. It's disgusting. Made two days before his death, at a time when I was working myself to a shadow to please him! Well, that's all the thanks people get in this world, and

Value of an Important Document

me with the deepest weed that I could wear! I vow, I wish I'd kicked the coffin!

"Be still? No, I won't be still. If *Percy* chooses to truckle to you and pretend he's satisfied with a damned unjust division of the property, he's welcome to do so, but I'm no dirt-eater, by Jove! I'll stand by my signature, but I'll do no more. I have my feelings, and I'm not afraid to show 'em, even if you *are* disgustingly rich through dead luck and favoritism, Mr. Residuary Legatee."

Mrs. Floyd added her tears and expostulations to the scene, and Mrs. Percival rebuked her nephew for his unseemly language, but to so great a state of fury had the disappointed young man been goaded by his wrongs that Percival's long-suffering politeness became exhausted, and he put an end to the brawl by escorting his cousin to the door. Mrs. Floyd now declared herself ready to forgive her sister for her criticism of Bobby and for Mr. Townshend's undue partiality, and peace once more spread her pinions over the mourners, but Percy's mediations were required to reconcile Bobby to his more fortunate kinsman.

CHAPTER XXXV

A COLLAPSE IN SPANISH ARCHITECTURE

MRS. PERCY TOWNSHEND came to see her cousin at the Van Rensselaers', being still under the ban of her grandmother's displeasure, and in exile from Fortmounthouse. "No, we had a perfectly horrid time," she said, frankly, in answer to Clip's inquiries about her trip. "Poor Percy was dreadfully ill both ways, and we hadn't time to breathe before we were obliged to turn around and come back. London is a detestable place to be alone in, and Percy was so busy that all I could do was to take a cab to Regent Street and buy things I didn't want, and then take another cab to the Doré Gallery and sit looking at those nightmares of pictures, or else go to the Tower and see where somebody's head was chopped off. As for the English spring, it's a delusion and a snare, but for pity's sake don't tell grandmamma that our trip wasn't a howling success. And isn't it too bad that I must come to see you in this hole-and-corner sort of way? I hardly feel any interest in having a house of my own when you are not allowed to be in it. I'm going to furnish a room all in blue for you, just the same, and you must come and help me choose

A Collapse in Spanish Architecture

the fittings. There's a house on Ninth Street we are looking at. I like it better down-town, don't you? It's near all the people I care for most, and possibly— Oh, Clip, it is a comfort to be independent, as you'll find when you have your own house and your own way, and then we can be together just as much as we choose, for I hate being separated!"

Percival came in while she was still talking of her plans, and she made him a pretty little speech on his accession to fortune. She said she hoped it would not spoil him more than the success of his book had done. The book, she was sure, must be very clever, as she couldn't understand it. She and Percy bore no ill-feeling, but Mrs. Townshend had been heard to make sour remarks, and her triumph at having been the only one to apprehend the old gentleman's real condition was obscured by her sense of flagrant injustice in his final disposal of his property. "She wants us to break the will," said Spriggy, with a little laugh. "Of course, we shouldn't attempt it in any case, but she doesn't know about Bobby's famous paper." There was already a certain edge to the tone in which she spoke of her mother-in-law, and she announced with unction that Percy was about to join another club. Altogether, she was very full of spirits, but her face grew wistful when she spoke of Fortmounthouse, and she asked eagerly for news of the implacable old magnate whom she had so recklessly defied. Would Sidney look for a saddle-horse for her? Percy had so little

A Victim of Circumstances

time, and, besides, knew nothing about horses. "Bobby says he has been to the circus, and he's glad of it," she further informed them. "His temper is dreadful nowadays, but I think he'll get over it. He is really too fond of you to stay long on bad terms with you. Will you keep the old house? Do you think you will live there? And won't you have a yacht? Oh, *do* have a yacht!"

"'With brass railings, and lots of divans,'" Percival quoted.

"That ridiculous evening! I hoped you had forgotten," said Clip.

Mrs. Townshend rose to go, not, she told herself, because "that ridiculous evening" still held so distinct a place in her own memory, but out of kindness to Sidney, who probably could dispense with the society of any third person. She had a little matronly air towards all unmarried people at this time; she was benevolent and protecting. When she had taken leave of them, Clip took up her embroidery and made desultory stitches on the canvas. "She is certainly looking perfectly lovely," she mused.

"She is a dear girl," Percival agreed, rather absently. "Shall we put that cushion on one of the divans—when it is finished?"

"If you want it. It is yours, you know."

"Would you mind living in the old house, Clip? I doubt if Uncle Maturin would have given it to me but for you. He had a curious delusion that last day," said Percival. "He continually spoke of you as 'Mary.'"

A Collapse in Spanish Architecture

"It's a dear old house. But I'm not the one to decide," said Clip, sewing vigorously.

"Don't be flippant, dear, or you will break my heart. It is all full of little cracks now, where you have been executing a *pas seul* on it at intervals for nearly a year."

"Cracked things last the longest."

"If they are mended by the one who broke them. Did you think I had forgotten that night? I tried so hard not to love you, and it was all of no use! And then you gave me the best thing a man can have, short of happiness—a little hope. You don't know what my life was, little girl, before you came into it. You can never understand what you have done for me, but I'll try to show you, if you will only trust yourself to me." He had put her sewing aside; he was bending over her, and she had no choice but to meet his eyes, whether she would or not. "I have wanted to tell you so often," he went on, "but I was afraid you didn't care, and so I waited. It seems to me that I have waited a long time, dear."

"I wish I were what you think me," she said, with the little tragic undercurrent in her voice which he had caught once or twice before. "But I'm different—oh, very, very different!"

"I love you," said Percival. "I know I don't deserve it, but can you try to love me a little? Say yes!"

"You have been very good to me," she said.

"Don't call it that, when I love you so. Won't you tell me that it doesn't seem altogether strange to you—the thought of being my wife?"

A Victim of Circumstances

"I suppose grandmamma has told you that I might," she answered.

"Yes, but I'm not asking her. It's what *you* tell me that I care about. Forget about her. You know that I would never have spoken a word to you if I had not believed that you cared a little yourself."

Clip clasped her hands tightly together. "She has settled it all, but there is something she hasn't told you. It isn't her fault. She doesn't know—nobody knows. I would have died sooner than have it suspected, and now I must tell you!"

"Tell me nothing that distresses you. And don't allow any one to force your inclinations," said Percival. "I don't care what it is—but I can't lose you now."

"I will do whatever you say, but not until you know." There were two red spots burning in her cheeks now, and her breath came and went in little gasps as she spoke. "I have cared for—some one else."

"Don't try to tell me, dear. I might have known. But now that it is all ended"—he tried to reassure himself at the same time, but his heart sank even as he spoke—"we will forget all about it and begin over again. I must ask you to forgive so much in me!"

"I thought it was ended. I said I *must* cure myself of it. Oh, if I had any pride, if I were not the most wretched creature in the world, I should be so glad to say yes! Will you ever believe that I expected to say it? And can you ever forgive me?"

"Do you mean that you care still?" he asked.

A Collapse in Spanish Architecture

" Yes."

He said nothing, but she, smitten at the sight of his face, spurred by her remorse to lay bare the secrets which pride and a lifetime of submission had sealed so long in her heart, recommenced painfully, piteously: " Oh, I know that it's shameful. It drives me mad to think of it. But he isn't so much to blame as you believe. He didn't know that I cared. I never told him. Only the day before Mrs. Acres came he asked me if I didn't, and I wouldn't own it. I don't know why it was so hard to say. And now I am glad that he will never know. And then you came, and I had always liked you and trusted you, and grandmamma approved, and I knew he wasn't what I thought him—from the moment I saw him with those horrible people—but I loved him—and it's very different.

" At first I thought he would come back. I used to watch for the mail—to listen for the sound of wheels. I felt sure he couldn't stay away. I was very conceited, you see. But I only wanted to see him to send him away again. I have been so angry, it has made me wicked. I wonder it hasn't put a mark on my face. I can never forgive him, or see him again. I wanted him to see that I had forgotten him.

" It wasn't altogether because I am a coward that I have let things go on in this way. Of course, I have always done as grandmamma wished, but I thought I wished it myself. I think I could have married any one else and not said a word.

A Victim of Circumstances

I have lied all my life, pretending to like things I hated, all for the sake of peace. But it's different with you. When you asked me *that*, I couldn't lie to you."

"I wish to God you had!" said Percival. He had listened in silence to her broken confession, reading between the lines the story of the long years of well-meant tyranny and submissiveness, which illuminated with fearful clearness the events of the past happy months—so happy, alas! so suddenly and fatally ended! Now a stifled sob cut short her utterance. She gave him a swift, imploring glance, and buried her face in her hands.

"Sidney, do you know what it is to be ashamed like this?"

"Yes, and with better cause," said Percival. The windows were open, and somewhere outside in the street a hand-organ was briskly grinding out a topical song. The lace curtains blew and swayed in the spring air. He turned to her, saying again: "Why did you tell me? I could have made you love me if I had not known this."

"Ah, no! You see what I am. Forgive me if you can, and, at least, forget me."

Forget her? There was small hope of that. He had been too intimately associated with her, and loved her too well. Even time could only dull the pain of this disappointment and separation. Every season would have its own especial crop of bitter-sweet memories. Snow or green grass, rain or sunshine, would all recall her to him. Her face would look out at him from every familiar corner,

A Collapse in Spanish Architecture

even of his own house. Through all the bitterness of his awakening the glamour still clung to her, and he could not love her less, or be long angry in the sight of her unhappiness. He realized what her avowal must have cost her, and suppressed the words that rose to his lips.

"What more can I say?" she asked, piteously. She had acknowledged herself a wicked, deceitful, wretch, deserving of all blame, but she had not expected to receive criticism from him, and his silence hurt her. His anger died as he realized the cruelty of her expiation. He remembered the magnate, grim in her solitude, her plans frustrated for the third time, and he pictured her reception of the news. When he could trust himself to speak, he had no reproaches for her, but an apprehensive pity mingled with his own unhappiness.

"My dear," he said, "I would have spared you this if I could."

"No one else knows," she said, miserably. It was an ambiguous speech enough, but he had no difficulty in divining its reference to Trevor.

"What can you do about it?" he asked.

"Nothing. I wouldn't if I could. If only I had behaved better to you!"

"I don't want to forget you, Clip. It is a cruel disappointment to me. I had never hoped so much. I am afraid I never can again. But, no matter what comes, you have given me the best year of my life—the only one I can look back to without shame and regret. I have been very happy while it lasted, and I am grateful to you."

A Victim of Circumstances

"I wish you wouldn't be so good to me," she said.

"Don't!" said Percival, quickly. "Well, good-bye. If you find you need—a friend up there, will you send for me?"

She stood irresolute for a moment, her great eyes searching his with an expression he did not understand. Did she wish him to insist on the privileges which had been accorded him, to marry her in spite of herself? Did she know her own mind even now? "Good-bye!" she said, in a very broken little voice, and left him. Her little thimble and scissors were still lying on the sofa. He stood looking at them blankly for a moment, then pulled himself together and went out into the spring street where the organ was grinding out its melodies. He seemed to have lost his mental balance. Where should he go? He was conscious of an impulse to seek out his cousin's wife, to say to her, "Spriggy, you know!" Ah, yes, she knew, far better than he thought; but one doesn't do those things when it comes to the point. He gravitated finally to the club, and looked over his mail, without remembering what he read. The last letter of all he opened mechanically, without noticing the handwriting. For more than two years he had not seen that bold, dashing scrawl. It was from the other woman. She was unhappy, and in great trouble. She had never loved any one but him. Wouldn't he see her? He tore the letter into neat little bits and put them into the ash-receiver. Perhaps she had heard of his uncle's will; perhaps not. It made no difference.

A Collapse in Spanish Architecture

It was impossible to return to the old way of life after having known Clip—but he rather envied a drunken man whom he met outside the club. He went back to his mother's house and dressed for dinner, feeling thankful that she was a tactful person, and one who asked no questions. He was not young enough to gloat over his grief, he had no intention of parading his emotions, but a conviction possessed him that this had come to stay.

CHAPTER XXXVI

DIPLOMACY

“WELL, if the duchess *did* give her a good wigging, of which I’ve little doubt, it’s no more than she deserves,” Mr. Floyd declared, flicking his leader. “It does beat the Dutch about girls. What does she expect? A crown-prince? There aren’t many such chances going begging, and, pretty as she is, she can’t expect to have it all her own way to the end of the chapter. She’s a beastly little flirt, and if he *does* go to the dogs, it will be all her fault. After keeping as straight as he has for a year past, and everybody supposing of course they were engaged—oh, hang the girl!”

“Don’t, Bobby!” Mrs. Townshend protested. “You don’t understand.”

“Do *you*?”

“It isn’t fair to judge unless you know everything.”

“Which you never will, my dear girl. Well, I’m glad I’ve forgiven him, poor devil, for he must be infernally cut up. And see the way he is working over the estate. Percy and I have been badly treated, but we’ve one consolation—we aren’t obliged to slave like that. I look into his office every few

Diplomacy

days, just to cheer him up a bit, and there he sits with a lawyer, and a stenographer, and Lord knows what, like some poor wretched clerk on a salary. And then people bother him so, always wanting him to sign his name to this, and examine that, and give his opinion of the other thing! Why, he hasn't had time even to go on a bat since she went back to Fortmounthouse."

"Stenographers?" Mrs. Townshend repeated. "One of my working-girls is a stenographer, and she has lost her place. I wonder if he couldn't give her something to do?"

"There's another one to bother him!" cried Mr. Floyd. "You're always boning your friends to employ your deserving poor. Didn't I send my pink coat to your little Jew tailor to clean, and didn't he ruin it for me?"

"You can't have money without bother, as I have been trying to prove to you ever since Uncle Maturin died. Do you suppose Sidney will be there still? Drive me there, like an angel, and we will see the office and speak about Fanny."

"She can't write very fast, but she's such a *good* girl!" Mr. Floyd hazarded, unkindly. "It's quite far down-town, you know, and I'm not driving cows."

"If you can't manage them, I can," she said, with decision. "Take me there."

"Whose carriage is that?" Mr. Floyd demanded, when their perilous journey had been accomplished. "It looks to me suspiciously like Aunt Augusta's. Begging for her old Chinese mission, I'll be bound—ordering him to endow a cargo of gospel-slingers

A Victim of Circumstances

to cram the Bible down the poor beggars' throats, whether they like it or not! And he's so silly, I don't doubt he'll do it."

Mr. Floyd's surmises were for once correct. Behind the ground-glass door of Percival's private office Mrs. Augusta Townshend was making a strenuous appeal in behalf of the Light to the Orient Society. With zeal and ability she cited statistics and estimates, appealing hopefully to the new régime for what she had never been able to accomplish under the old. Long and earnestly had she laid siege to Mr. Townshend, hoping that, through sheer weariness, he would capitulate to the extent of endowing a Beacon House in Armenia or Bombay; and since he had incontinently died in the full force of his prejudices, her aspirations set with fresh vehemence towards the hitherto untried field of Percival's predilections. She had explained to him carefully that the work was non-sectarian; she appealed eloquently to his better feelings; she reminded him that he was ambitious to be considered a useful member of the community, and she concluded her peroration with the remark, "I trust you bear in mind that you are only the steward of your wealth."

"Certainly, Aunt Augusta," Percival replied, politely, "but the post is no sinecure, and I consider myself entitled to a pretty good salary."

"I did not expect flippancy from you, Sidney. I thought I had observed a change for the better in your behavior, and I mentioned it to your uncle. Instead of squandering a fortune every year on

Diplomacy

scholarships to worthless artists, or putting your trust in horses and chariots, like some I could mention, I had hoped that you would realize the necessity of spreading The Truth among the poor benighted heathen of the Orient."

"They don't consider themselves heathen, you know," said Percival. "On the contrary, I am personally acquainted with several learned pagans—admirable men, I assure you—who are matching their gods for my conversion. There's a delightful Buddhist priest who went back to Boston last week; I think he has hopes of me."

"It is scandalous to say such things, even in joke," Mrs. Townshend exclaimed. "I begin to believe that your altered behavior was all a pose, to be forsaken as soon as you had attained your ends."

"The Lord knows, Aunt Augusta, that I wish Percy had attained them instead!" said Percival, wearily. "I'm bad enough, I admit, but I can't be half as worthless as I'm inclined to be with the responsibility of all this money hanging like a millstone around my neck. As far as my private means will enable me, I shall be enchanted, of course, to disseminate Christian virtues among the heathen, but, if you will recall Uncle Maturin's principles, you must realize that the Townshend Estate cannot found a foreign mission."

The good lady departed much chagrined, casting the weight of her disapproval on the executor's shoulders, already considerably burdened, and collided with her daughter-in-law and nephew in

A Victim of Circumstances

the outer office. Mr. Floyd put her into her carriage, taking a malicious pleasure in her sour comments on his new tandem which dazzled the gaze at the curb. At the door he met an acquaintance, and stayed to gossip, while Spriggy set about her errand.

"I'm thankful to see you," said Percival. "Don't you scent missions in the air? I wish Heaven had intended me for a philanthropist, and that I hadn't promised like an idiot to regard Uncle Maturin's pet prejudices. It's so much easier to give people a check and your blessing than to explain to them that in your opinion they do more harm than good, and you can't honestly give them your support. The fact is, I'm out of place here. You and Percy were the right people for this business."

"But you understand, don't you, that we are perfectly satisfied with things as they are?" Mrs. Townshend asked, quickly.

"I'm not," said Percival. "The more I think about it, the more I feel that it was a mistake."

"You work too hard. You need a change," she suggested. "The Herries are going to Japan. Why don't you join them?"

"I can't go at present. Besides, I promised the old man to stay here," said Percival. "You look sorry yourself. My dear girl, are you quite sure that you don't see the injustice and absurdity of it? Are you sure that there's nothing you regret?"

"The only thing I truly regret is that I sha'n't be able to build my hospital," Mrs. Townshend admitted, frankly. "That was the one plan I made, *à la* milkmaid, and it is my one disappointment,

Diplomacy

Of course, we can't afford to do it now, for Percy says it would cripple me dreadfully to take it out of my principal, and I hate to give up any of the work I am carrying on already. I wanted to build it on the river—the East Side, you know, where I've been working for the last two winters. They need it so much!"

"That strikes me as a sensible idea," said Percival. "You know how to manage those things, and I don't. I've had no experience. Decidedly that ought to be your affair. Will you do it for me?"

The executive Spriggy's face glowed. "You mean that I am to build it for you? Oh, Sidney, there is nothing I should love so much! It will be even better than doing it all myself. But you'll let me give *something*, won't you?—an operating-room, or something of the sort? Then I shall be perfectly happy—or I should be if it were not for grandmamma!"

They both fell into a silence, sharing the same thought—the haunting recollection of Clip in her loneliness, doomed to an endless tête-à-tête with the grim and baffled old woman, and to the humiliation of her own reflections. It was a picture which often visited Percival, and with its every recurrence the impulse strengthened within him to set matters straight with Trevor, to send him back at least to take his dismissal like a man, if indeed she held to her determination not to forgive him.

It was this thought that finally spurred him to a step which in any one else he would have considered absurd and quixotic. There seemed to be

A Victim of Circumstances

nothing else to do. It was not only the responsibility that stood between him and the old existence where one had been easily enough diverted when things went wrong. He himself was changed. He had tried to divert himself, and failed. Now he felt sure that nothing could render his own cause more hopeless than it already was, and that Clip might be made less miserable if his mission proved successful. That a modicum of success would crown his efforts he had no doubt whatever, for he knew his man.

Trevor had just returned from a long ride with the present enslaver of his fancy, whom he had followed to Boston, when Percival's card was brought to him, with "on business" pencilled below the engraving. It would have been a very simple matter to transact all necessary formalities with regard to Mr. Townshend's legacy through the medium of a lawyer, and Trevor, who had heard rumors, if not the most recent ones, was disquieted at sight of the black-bordered card with its formal message. "It isn't like him to come here to crow over me," he reflected, resentfully, as he directed that his visitor should be shown to his own sitting-room, "but what else brings him?"

The quondam friends greeted each other with cautious civility, and Percival explained the cause of his visit, which, it seemed, was due to some complications which had arisen regarding the bequest. Never in the memory of man had Trevor shown himself so concise and attentive, never had any business been so quickly transacted between them.

Diplomacy

The ease and impersonal politeness which Trevor displayed were a triumph of duplicity. He expressed regret that Percival should have been put to the trouble of a trip to Boston on his account; Percival assured him that the journey had been a necessary one in any case, since he had somewhat absurdly promised to stand godfather to the first baby of an old college friend. It was not until the interview was practically finished that the recollection of their common past overwhelmed Trevor's resolve to stand on his dignity, and he blandly ventured a personality as Percival was rising to go: "I hope your mother is well?"

"Thank you, she is quite well," said Percival, moving towards the door.

"How is Percy? I heard about the wedding, though I received only announcement cards."

"He seems happy, in a chastened way," said Percival, with his hand on the door-knob.

"You appear to be in a hurry."

"You are going out."

"On the contrary, I have just come in, and, besides," said Trevor, with an uneasy laugh, "you have given me no chance to ask if you'd smoke. You used to like these."

"Oh, thanks, it's rather near dinner," said Percival.

"You've turned over a new leaf, I see," Trevor observed. "I think you might stretch a point, though. You needn't be so confoundedly stiff, just because we're not as intimate as we used to be. It's quite on the cards that this isn't the last time

A Victim of Circumstances

we shall meet, and if you are going to carry matters so far as to refuse a cigar—”

“Of course, if you make a personal matter of it—” Percival remarked, a trifle reproachfully. He was on quite as bad terms with Trevor as he desired to be with any one.

“I do make a personal matter of it. Here’s a more comfortable chair. Make yourself at home. Don’t bother to invent a reason for going. I understand all that.”

Percival took the chair and the cigar, saying, “I don’t wish to appear ungracious, of course, but I didn’t suppose you cared to see me.”

“I want to hear about the wedding,” said Trevor. “I didn’t ask any questions, for there’s no sense in informing people that you’re on bad terms with your family, but I should like an account of it, for all that.”

“Well, it was very much like other weddings, except that we were all secretly aghast at our own temerity in aiding and abetting such rank rebellion. When I stood fumbling in my pocket for the ring I expected to see Madam Trevor come forward and smite us. My hand trembled so that I barely escaped dropping the whole business down the register.”

“Didn’t she forbid the banns?”

“Providentially, she contented herself with ignoring us,” said Percival, “which afforded us great relief and some mortification.”

“How did Percy get through the ceremony? Didn’t he funk?”

Diplomacy

"He squeaked his responses, but he really wasn't half as badly scared as I was."

"Did Mrs. Floyd howl?"

"I am told that after they left for the train everybody wept profusely, and Aunt Emmy outdid herself in honor of the occasion."

"How did Spriggy look?"

"Very pretty. In fact, I never saw her look so well. She spoke up like a little man, too."

"I didn't think she would have the grit to do it," said Trevor. "You know grandmother's régime was never what you would call lax. Military discipline from the time you're in leading-strings until you kick over the traces—and we are bound to kick over them sooner or later. Now, she would never have married Percy if the old lady had given her her head. Depend upon it, he has the opposition to thank for his luck, for, as a matter of fact, she didn't care a rap about him."

"I think she's very fond of him," said Percival, with conviction.

"Any bridesmaids?"

"No."

"Has the old lady come 'round yet?"

"I don't think so."

"No, she's not much given to the forgiving of trespasses," said Trevor. "Trust a good woman to remember your peccadilloes to her dying day, and throw them in your teeth as well. I suppose you are in high favor, now that Spriggy and I are both in her black-books."

"I hardly know," said Percival.

A Victim of Circumstances

"I've read your book," said Trevor, indicating the volume with a motion of his hand. "Miss Cressingham admires it. Miss Cressingham is a judge of literature. It was rather shabby in you not to send me a copy, now that everybody is talking about it."

"If you hadn't been considerate enough to buy one, I should make haste to rectify the mistake."

"How does Bobby stand your acquisitions?"

"He has forgiven me," said Percival. "*Your* latest acquisition seems to be a particularly nasty cough."

"It's my left lung. It has been rather troublesome ever since last fall. Did the general leave anything?"

"A fine collection of scarf-pins, I believe."

"Well, they will be no worse off than they were before," said Trevor, indefinitely. "How long do you expect to be here?"

"Until Friday."

"Dine with me to-morrow night. Carolan is coming, and some other people."

"Thanks, but you know I'm staying with the Mallorys."

The blood mounted to Trevor's face. "I suppose you expect me to apologize to you," he said. "Do you think that my remarks were so much more unpardonable than yours?"

"What's the use of discussing it?" asked Percival.

"Just as you say. I had an idea that perhaps you were willing to treat me as you would treat any other acquaintance," said Trevor, huffily.

Diplomacy

"However, you needn't leave quite yet, even if you want to. I was going to ask you if you had heard anything from Courtenay since he left?"

"No. Why should I?"

"I don't know. I fancied he might write to you. I have an idea that he has gone to the bad entirely," said Trevor. "Poor devil, I'm sorry for him! It doesn't take much to start a man downhill, and after the first push he needs no assistance."

"You exhibit a beautiful feeling of Christian charity," said Percival.

"I suppose you mean I'm a fool," said Trevor.

Percival flicked the ash off his cigar and said nothing.

Trevor went on after a moment with considerable vehemence: "I know I haven't much cause to love him, but, then, he wasn't to blame for acting like an idiot. And probably, if he hadn't managed to hit me, I should have broken his neck for him."

"At this rate you will presently arrive at the conclusion that you are under obligations to him," said Percival.

"No, I'm under obligations to you, which is worse," said Trevor, half laughing and half angry. "Why on earth didn't you let me die, while I was about it? The rest would never have known enough to do what you did—and I don't thank you for it, either. I've had a good enough winter, as far as that goes, but it doesn't pay—and I've been just as miserable as though it were worth the candle. You needn't look that way. I believe I'm homesick, thanks to you."

A Victim of Circumstances

"It's a pity I came, then," said Percival. "I didn't expect it would strike you that way."

"Do I believe you looked me up simply on business? I know very well you'd see me damned first," said Trevor, with beautiful frankness. "No, you want to give me a chance to apologize to you. To quote Bobby, I'm no dirt-eater. But a friend is a friend. I don't care for new people. It's too much trouble to begin at the beginning. With you I've only to start where I left off. You'll do me the justice to admit that our differences were not of my seeking, and I'll admit that I said things I've been very sorry for ever since. If people had only left me alone, I should have come out all right, but Spriggy aggravated me. I've quarrelled with every one I ever cared for over that business. Now, don't say anything. Of course, it won't be easy for me to do it, but, if you don't mind, I should like to write to her and tell her that I'm sorry and all that. And—I congratulate you, old man."

"You needn't," said Percival, a trifle grimly.

"You don't mean that—" Trevor began, excitedly. As Percival remained silent, he could not finish his question, but said, instead: "Well, we are in the same boat. Shake hands and call it quits." He wrung his friend's hand, and a fresh silence fell between them. "I beg your pardon," he went on presently. "I shouldn't have spoken, but I had been told positively. And I wanted you to know that I hadn't any ill-feeling about it." He drummed on the table, grew more restless than ever, and finally burst out with, "How is she?"

Diplomacy

"She seemed very well," said Percival, with unsatisfactory calm. "I have not seen her for some time. For particulars you might apply to your grandmother."

"I have an idea of applying to Clip herself," said Trevor, a trifle defiantly.

"You might make the experiment," said Percival.

"You're not very encouraging."

"I don't intend to be."

"But, confound you, Sidney! Can't you see that I'm just as much in love with her as ever? And it might make the old lady feel better to give me my *congé* herself. You thought I was an unmitigated cad, now, didn't you?"

"That's stating it mildly," said Percival, politely.

"Well, I'm a little of your opinion myself by this time," Trevor observed, rather comfortably than otherwise. He was one of those people who hold that the confession of a fault is its palliation, and who take great credit to themselves for admitting that they are no saints. Nevertheless, he was evidently profoundly moved, and perfectly sincere in his emotion. "I *have* been a brute, but it was because I was afraid to see her again. I thought they would only make a dupe of me between them, and I knew she didn't care for me. But now—I suppose you think they won't forgive me on any account?"

"I shouldn't be over-sanguine," said Percival.

"Well, you see, women are different. They are fond of overlooking things. At any rate, they

A Victim of Circumstances

shall have the opportunity. I'll go back to New York to-morrow. Then if she chooses to send me about my business, I'll take my dismissal, and that ends it. But why wouldn't she—unless—?" He looked across the table with real admiration and affection to Percival, who was feeling nervous and irritated, but returned his gaze with a certain responsiveness. After all, he was glad to be at peace with Trevor, and could not help liking him. There was a confidence in his open appeal for sympathy which few could willingly betray, and the charm of his personality had always been a potent factor in his hold on his friend's constancy. Besides, twenty years of intimate association count for something.

"I can tell you one thing," Trevor said, earnestly; "this is the last row I shall ever have with you."

"I think myself it's the last but one," said Percival, dryly. The situation was not devoid of a certain grim humor for him. "As I have a dinner engagement, I ought to be getting back."

"I have one myself, confound it!" said Trevor. "I'm half inclined to cut it and go down to-night. Good-bye, if you must go. I'll telegraph you in a day or two. And remember, old man, that if it's all right, you're to dine with us once a week. I would have done the same for you if you had wanted me."

By this time Percival was perfectly aware that he regretted the success of his self-appointed diplomatic mission. Forgive him? Certainly she would forgive him. There was not the slightest

Diplomacy

doubt of that. It had been the only thing to do, of course, and if Trevor had shown himself able to rise above bad feeling, he could surely do as much, but for the present he did not experience that glow which should follow the performance of a worthy action. Trevor grasped his hand effusively as he turned to go. "Sid," he said, parenthetically and with suspicious haste, "you're a pretty good sort!" And, cheered by this modicum of praise, Percival returned to his friend's house, while Trevor went to Marlborough Street to casually inform Miss Cressingham that he was leaving Boston in the morning.

CHAPTER XXXVII

FORTUNE FAVORS THE BOLD

IN spite of the mud underfoot, and the brisk breeze, by far too chilly for the season, Madam Trevor stood on the lawn with skirts well tucked up, personally supervising the removal of the bulbs and the transplanting of the geraniums. Jim, pressed into the service, was painting sticks for the pinks and fuchsias under his sister's direction. The river looked very attractive, and the Turnbull boy had just passed in his sloop. Jim grumbled under his breath, and was rejoiced at the sound of wheels on the gravel, which might possibly be bearing a visitor for his grandmother and afford him an opportunity of escape.

The carriage, however, proceeded no farther than the back piazza, where there ensued an exclamatory duet of soprano voices, and in a moment Mrs. Percy Townshend marched through the hall and presented herself to her grandmother's astounded gaze. She was decked for the assault in a beautiful spring costume of extremely dashing half-mourning, and she advanced with great assurance and dignity to the spot where Madam Trevor stood, with elevated skirts and a rake in her hand. "Since

Fortune Favors the Bold

you didn't invite me, I thought I would dispense with formality," she announced, bold as a lion without, and quaking inwardly at the sight of the old autocrat whose yoke she had so recently thrown off.

"Go back to the piazza," said the magnate, "and don't come trapesing through the mud in that dress. When I have finished out here I shall have something to say to you."

Clip joined her cousin at the door. "Do you think she will send you home?" she asked. She did not seem as much frightened at the situation as she had been at the marriage. She looked rather pale, a little pensive, and decidedly older than when Spriggy had last seen her.

"She can't do more," said Mrs. Townshend.

"You should have brought Percy and knelt at her feet," Clip suggested.

"Thanks, I preferred to manage this in my own way," said Mrs. Townshend, calmly. "Percy knows nothing about it, but I have brought a little hand luggage, as you see, and if she doesn't actually put me out of the house I propose to stay all night. In that case I shall telegraph him, and if she won't let me stay I shall simply go back by the next train, and no one need be any the wiser."

Some time elapsed before Madam Trevor granted the promised interview to her undutiful granddaughter, and when she finally led the way into the library her expression was distinctly withering. Spriggy, however, declined to be withered. Sundry victorious fields where her mother-in-law had been

A Victim of Circumstances

routed with great slaughter now dwelt in her memory and swelled her courage for the fray.

"Well, Rose," said the magnate, "to what am I to attribute the honor of this unsolicited visit?"

"Oh, I thought I would come," said Spriggy, apologetically.

"Perhaps you have discovered by this time that I was not wholly wrong in my conclusions?" her grandmother surmised. "I know the Harding family root and branch, and Percy takes after his mother. How often have I warned you against fortune-hunters and people who don't believe as you do? Even his own uncle couldn't regard him as an appropriate head of the family, in spite of his name. That speaks volumes in itself. He tried to deceive me with representations of what Maturin Townshend proposed doing for him, but I never placed the slightest reliance on his stories. I knew perfectly well that Maturin Townshend couldn't rest in his grave with a Harding in his shoes."

"We are perfectly satisfied, grandmamma," said Mrs. Townshend.

"Yes, he managed to secure himself in any case, but don't expect me to believe that it wasn't a bitter disappointment to him," her grandmother resumed. "It is well enough to brazen it out with outsiders, but *I* am not to be hoodwinked so easily."

"You are altogether unjust to my husband," said Spriggy, with dignity.

"I suppose he sent you?" the magnate observed, with conviction.

Fortune Favors the Bold

Mrs. Townshend's pretty chin gave an involuntary upward jerk. "I can assure you he didn't!" she said, with decision. "He knows nothing whatever about it."

"I've no doubt Augusta Harding is pleased to see you estranged from your family," said Madam Trevor.

"Then, grandmamma, allow me to say that you are doing your best to gratify her," said Spriggy, with spirit.

"I warned you what to expect," said the magnate, severely. "I told you that I wouldn't countenance your marriage, and I never shall. Neither will I receive Percy Townshend under my roof."

"I'm very sorry," said Spriggy, with equal severity, "for, of course, if you can't receive my husband, you can't receive me."

"I wasn't aware that I had expressed a desire to do so," Madam Trevor observed, crushingly. "You had your choice between marrying as you did and remaining on good terms with your family. I gave you no reason to expect that you could do both."

"I thought that by this time—" Spriggy began.

"The next train leaves at one fifteen," said the magnate, with an air of ending the discussion. "I trust you didn't dismiss your carriage."

"I did. I suppose I can walk to the station," Mrs. Townshend replied, with equal decision.

"You are not dressed for a country walk. Ira can drive you down. Marjorie, go to the stable and see that the flaps are properly put on to the

A Victim of Circumstances

carryall, and tell Ira to be ready to take Mrs. Townshend to the one-fifteen train. The brown horses, and he is not to check them. No, not a word. Go at once."

There was no more to be said, and Clip, with rebellion in her heart, set forth on her uncongenial errand, hoping forlornly that some unforeseen circumstance would move the despot to relent before the carriage could be brought to the door. As she was returning to the house, another carriage turned in at the gate, and she hastened towards it, fearing that by some inopportune chance it might be Percy, come to join his wife; but on a nearer view of its occupant she turned and fled down the wet terrace and towards the north gate. Before the rusty iron filigrees she paused, breathless and terrified, and looked back to see whether she was pursued. She had been praying in her heart just now that something would happen to avert the coming catastrophe, but was *this* the looked-for succor? She didn't wish to see him; she hoped he could not find her. She did not know why he had come, but she had a great dread of meeting him face to face. It was with positive horror that she saw him approaching. If she could have crept through the bars, she would certainly have done so. As it was, she leaned against the gate, panting, terrified, and defiant, and in a moment he stood beside her.

For some seconds they stood looking at each other intently and in dead silence, which she was the first to break. "You will find grand-

Fortune Favors the Bold

mamma out by the flower-beds. You might have discovered her without chasing me."

"Is that all you have to say to me, Clip?" he asked.

"Quite all," she answered, with decision. She was rapidly recovering her self-possession, and, however much the meeting might try her, she was determined not to show it.

He did not offer to let her pass. On the contrary, he was staring hard at her left hand, which still grasped one of the bars of the gate. He had prepared several properly penitent and conciliatory speeches on his way down from Boston, but he straightway forgot them all, and substituted one as utterly preposterous as can well be imagined: "Clip, where is my ring?"

"In grandmamma's safe. She would have sent it back to you, but unfortunately she didn't know your address," said Miss Trevor, frigidly.

"You don't appear glad to see me," he said, in a piqued tone.

"*Glad!*" she echoed, crushingly.

"I haven't had a happy moment since I left here. I was a brute, if you like, but it was because I loved you. And I wasn't sure of you," he went on. "If I had known you cared for me, it would have been different."

"Indeed!"

"I'll do anything you like, if you'll only say you forgive me, and wear my ring again," he protested. "Upon my word, Clip, if it would be any satisfaction to you to see me go down abjectly on my knees to you in the mud, or do any other form of

A Victim of Circumstances

penance you may suggest, I won't hesitate a moment."

"I'm afraid you can't regain my good opinion by making a spectacle of yourself," she answered, discouragingly.

"*Regain* it? I wasn't aware I ever had it," said Trevor. "I had no idea of it until the day before yesterday. I don't feel certain of it now. But why wouldn't you—why did you refuse Sidney?"

Clip hid her face in her hands.

"My dearest girl, listen to me," he went on, very earnestly. "I have behaved like a fool. It was inexcusable, and I humbly beg your pardon for it. It appears that you are not willing to forgive me, and I can't blame you for it, but at least—well, in short, here I am, and if you are determined to break with me, I suppose it's no more than I deserve."

"I really think you will survive it," said Miss Trevor, looking away from him. She was glad to see the anxiety on his face. His abuse of his own conduct was like music in her ears. She might possibly forgive him, when she had kept him on the rack a little longer, but as for wearing his ring again, that was quite out of the question.

"I was a jealous idiot," he declared, "but why did you never come near me—afterwards—if you didn't care for Courtenay?"

"After the flattering manner in which you treated me, it would have been quite appropriate, I'm sure," said Miss Trevor, with fine irony.

"But you *didn't* care for him?"

Fortune Favors the Bold

"Certainly not. Now, if you please, I will go back to the house."

"But I don't please," said Trevor, desperately. "I want you to say that you will give me another trial. I can't give you up. I never knew how much I loved you until I thought you cared for that fellow. And you must admit I had some grounds for believing it."

"I don't think I care to be loved by any one who can't trust me," said Clip, with dignity.

"But, darling, I will. I do. Try me, and see if I don't!" he protested.

At this moment the stable-door creaked on its rollers, and the carryall bumped over the slide into the road. Clip recalled her cousin's plight with a pang of self-reproach. She had almost forgotten it, and now the dreadful fact overwhelmed her that Spriggy was going away, virtually banished from her home, as soon as the carriage reached the door. What could she do to propitiate her grandmother and induce her to forego the sentence of exile? She gave a little cry of distress, and Trevor, who knew nothing of the situation, and would have forgotten Spriggy's predicament had he been aware of it, in the stress of his own emotion, seized that moment as a propitious one in which to assume that Clip's obduracy had melted before his persuasive powers. It was then that both reason and natural inclination suggested the same expedient to her. This was the answer to her petitions, the only way of helping Spriggy. "Come to the house and see what grandmamma says about it," she

A Victim of Circumstances

suggested. He was inclined to make objections, but she overruled them, and conducted him, considerably mystified, into the presence of the magnate.

Madam Trevor, shorn of her gardening equipment, was standing on the steps in a stern and judicial attitude. Mrs. Townshend was preparing to get into the carryall.

"Grandmamma," said Clip, slipping her hand through the old lady's rigid and substantial arm, "here is Roy."

Madam Trevor turned and stared at her grandson, her face working convulsively. "He can go to the station with Rose. There is the carriage," she said, with a majestic wave of her hand.

"But—he doesn't want to go—and if *I* say he may stay—" said Clip, entreatingly.

It was at this precise juncture that Trevor comprehended the situation, and repaired his previous blunders by a stroke of inspiration. He embraced his grandmother without permission, and offered his arm to Mrs. Townshend. "Suppose we send the carryall back to the stable," he suggested, cheerfully.

"James," said Madam Trevor, "bring me a chair."

"We sha'n't need you, Ira," said Clip.

Mrs. Townshend seized this opportunity of embracing her august relative, and pointing out the fact that she was prepared to remain overnight. The magnate sat with folded hands while the carryall disappeared around the curve. Spriggy was crying, but only a slight pink flush on her high

Fortune Favors the Bold

features attested to any emotion on the part of the dethroned potentate. "James," she said, "run after Ira, and tell him to go immediately to the butcher's and bring home a dozen chops and a large roast. Rose, you are sitting on my skirt."

"I can assure you, though," said Clip, under cover of the confusion, "that if it had not been for Spriggy I should never have said yes—never in this world!"

"Then Spriggy has my life-long gratitude," said Trevor.

"Marjorie, your feet are wet. Come up-stairs directly with me and change your shoes. No, no, Roy! I'll have no nonsense. Make a fool of yourself, if you like, but not of me." She swept her granddaughter before her up the stairs, leaving the two quondam exiles to felicitate each other upon their recall from banishment. As she passed the curve Clip looked back at them with a light in her face which neither had ever seen there before.

"You're right," said Trevor. "I don't deserve it."

"Only be good to her!" said Spriggy, with a little sob in her voice.

As the family was still in mourning, and the prospective bridegroom most unwilling to wait, the wedding was fixed for July. There had been plenty of gossip about the renewal of the engagement, and Madam Trevor considered that a speedy marriage was the best method of silencing it. The ceremony was to be a very quiet one, and Percival

A Victim of Circumstances

had reluctantly consented to be best man. Mrs. Townshend brought her husband to Fortmount-house in triumph as an invited guest. Percy approved of the match in a general way, as being quite suitable and proper, but he confided to his wife while she altered the position of his scarf-pin that he should never be able to understand why Clip had preferred Trevor to Percival.

"Women have always been falling in love with Sidney, and the only one he wanted wouldn't have him," he observed, pensively. "Well, such is life!"

"Would you have had her marry a man she didn't love?" Spriggy demanded, a trifle severely. "You don't know what that is for a woman." Having spoken thus, she felt vaguely conscience-stricken, and carefully brushed an imaginary fleck off his coat. Percy felt no shades of compunction in his wife's act, nor dreamed of any cause for them. Had she not married him?

Down-stairs Madam Trevor, in her historic black velvet, was taking a last look at the long table and sniffing furtively. A great many tall Van Rensselaer cousins, dressed in white, were to hold the ribbons between which the bridal party was to pass, and Mrs. Floyd, in a new and most fashionable gown, had come early to miss no detail of the ceremony. Though eschewing general society since Mr. Townshend's death, she felt she might make an exception in favor of Madam Trevor's granddaughter.

It was generally surmised that the bridal party would appear at the precise moment when it was

Fortune Favors the Bold

due, as Madam Trevor's regard for punctuality was well known, but on this occasion routine was valueless, and the bride was late, as brides always are. The bridegroom was a trifle nervous, and the best man's face was devoid of expression of any kind. Mrs. Floyd sniffed audibly all through the ceremony. Every one drew a long breath when it was over, and began to talk loud and fast. Clip's color came back as she received her congratulations, and Trevor appeared radiant. Jim stumbled over his sister's train as Madam Trevor led the way to the dining-room. The magnate was now in her glory, and presided at the long table with the dignity of a dowager empress, gracious, urbane, inwardly ruminating on time-tables and trains. The little bride, to whom her train and veil lent an unsuspected height and dignity, stood up to cut the bridecake while her husband held her bouquet for her. The sight affected Percy to the verge of sentiment, and he turned a feeling glance towards Spriggy, who happened at that moment to be talking across the table to Percival, and did not notice it. "The duchess has just ordered me to have a stained-glass window placed in Saint Elizabeth's in memory of Uncle Maturin," he was saying. "It is to be a rose window, with an angel's head on it, and it must be in place before next Easter. Wonderful woman! She thinks of everything."

Bobby made a flowery and incoherent speech, in which he referred in touching terms to his own lone condition, and before the close of which the magnate rose from the table and intimated to Clip

A Victim of Circumstances

that trains are no more in the habit of waiting for brides than for ordinary mortals.

Percival was standing in the hall when the newly made Mrs. Trevor finally came out to go upstairs. She went to him impulsively, with outstretched hands, her hair shining under her veil, her diamonds sparkling incongruously in the afternoon sunlight. "I can't go away without thanking you," she said. "You have always been very good to both of us—more than good to me—and I want to feel sure that when we come back you will still be my friend—*our* friend—just as you were before."

Her face was radiant, but the little thrill of pathos called to him as always in her voice. What could he do but take her hand in the conventional manner, and assure her that there should be no difference? Later, when she came down-stairs in her travelling-dress, with no time to lose, the entire assemblage, save only Mr. Floyd, who had mysteriously disappeared, was awaiting her on the piazza and on the steps. The carriage stood before the door, and, amid a confusion of handshakings, embraces, and good-byes, the bride was handed in. Trevor turned once more to grasp his best man's hand, triumphant and emotionally grateful, and a shower of rice descended from an upper window. Jim came dashing up to the carriage, crying, "You've forgotten your bouquet!" and handed it in to his sister. With quick dexterity she separated the masses of flowers with her little gloved hands and flung them back to the people waiting to see her

Fortune Favors the Bold

drive away. There was a general scramble for these mementos of the occasion, and Bobby from his window flung an old slipper with unerring aim into the departing vehicle. One white rose fell at Percival's feet. He picked it up and thrust it into his pocket. Apparently this was all that was left to him of Clip.

2 A

THE END

BY RUTH McENERY STUART

MORIAH'S MOURNING, and Other Half - Hour Sketches. Illustrated. Post 8vo, Cloth, Ornamental, \$1 25.

IN SIMPKINSVILLE. Character Tales. Illustrated. Post 8vo, Cloth, Ornamental, \$1 25.

SOLOMON CROW'S CHRISTMAS POCKETS, and Other Tales. Illustrated. Post 8vo, Cloth, Ornamental, \$1 25.

CARLOTTA'S INTENDED, and Other Tales. Illustrated. Post 8vo, Cloth, Ornamental, \$1 50.

A GOLDEN WEDDING, and Other Tales. Illustrated. Post 8vo, Cloth, Ornamental, \$1 50.

THE STORY OF BABETTE: A Little Creole Girl. Illustrated. Post 8vo, Cloth, Ornamental, \$1 50.


Mrs. Stuart is one of some half-dozen American writers who are doing the best that is being done for English literature at the present time. Her range of dialect is extraordinary; but, after all, it is not the dialect that constitutes the chief value of her work. That will be found in its genuineness, lighted up as it is by superior intelligence and imagination and delightful humor.—*Chicago Tribune*.

Mrs Stuart is a genuine humorist.—*N. Y. Mail and Express*.

Few surpass Mrs. Stuart in dialect studies of negro life and character.—*Detroit Free Press*.

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK AND LONDON

 Any of the above works will be sent by mail, postage prepaid, to any part of the United States, Canada, or Mexico, on receipt of the price.

By ELIZABETH B. CUSTER

FOLLOWING THE GUIDON. Illustrated. Post 8vo, Cloth, Ornamental, \$1 50.

The story is a thrillingly interesting one, charmingly told. . . . Mrs. Custer gives sketches photographic in their fidelity to fact, and touches them with the brush of the true artist just enough to give them coloring. It is a charming volume, and the reader who begins it will hardly lay it down until it is finished.—*Boston Traveller*.

An admirable book. Mrs. Custer was almost as good a soldier as her gallant husband, and her book breathes the true martial spirit.—*St. Louis Republic*.

BOOTS AND SADDLES ; or, Life in Dakota with General Custer. With Portrait of General Custer, and Map. Post 8vo, Cloth, Ornamental, \$1 50.

A book of adventure is interesting reading, especially when it is all true, as is the case with "Boots and Saddles." . . . Mrs. Custer does not obtrude the fact that sunshine and solace went with her to tent and fort, but it inheres in her narrative none the less, and as a consequence "these simple annals of our daily life," as she calls them, are never dull nor uninteresting.—*Evangelist*, N. Y.


No better or more satisfactory life of General Custer could have been written. . . . We know of no biographical work anywhere which we count better than this.—*N. Y. Commercial Advertiser*.

TENTING ON THE PLAINS ; or, General Custer in Kansas and Texas. Illustrated. Post 8vo, Cloth, \$1 50.

Mrs. Custer was a keen observer. . . . The narrative abounds in vivid description, in exciting incident, and gives us a realistic picture of adventurous frontier life. This new edition will be welcomed.—*Boston Advertiser*.

HARPER & BROTHERS. PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK AND LONDON

 Any of the above works will be sent by mail, postage prepaid, to any part of the United States, Canada, or Mexico, on receipt of the price

Digitized by Google